



A DEVOTIONAL PROGRAM

DEDICATED TO

**THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF
JESUS CHRIST**

(Series 1 of 3)

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(1941 - 2012 / RIP)**



Happy are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the Lord.
Happy are they who observe his decrees,
who seek him with all their heart,
and do no wrong, but walk in his ways.
-----Psalm 119:1-2



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INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

Christianity has a story to tell. This story was lived out in the real world some 2000 years ago. It has continued every day since then, and continues to do so throughout the entire world.

As we explore the biblical text, we seek Christ and we get changed during that search. This can be the most thrilling experience of anyone's life. As we draw nearer and nearer to Jesus during our studies of his life and times, we dramatically encounter the Holy Spirit pervading our every thought and decision. The Holy Spirit is at work and active in us and among us in ways that change the world we touch, feel, and sense. With the Spirit at work in us, things start coming together, everything now working right and adding up for Christ.

Private, prayerful Bible reading is intimate and personal. The Bible can be the center for our prayers. As you read the Bible text, ask God to show you how to read it as He intended for it to be read. In other words, pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance in this search. Bible study is also the greatest method of building skills in spiritual discernment. It is the Spirit which leads and gives direction on all matters. He shows us what he wants us to do, and be. Before anything else, discernment is a gift from God. The Holy Spirit was present in that upper room where the believers had gathered together following Jesus' return to the Father. The Spirit did not ascend to Heaven as Jesus did, but remained and has been working throughout the years in those who listen. He guides each believer who is willing to listen, and He teaches them--by shedding light on the mysteries of life. Through the Spirit, we become more fully alive!!! In a sense we become under new management -- the Holy Spirit and you are one. Paul understood this concept so well. In Galatians 5:24-25 Paul says:
"Now those who belong to Christ [Jesus] have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit."

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PRAYER

Prayer is a window to God. Psalm 46:10 reads: "Be still, and know that I am God.... . Our soul, our spirit, our very being, needs to be in touch with the creator. When you pray it is a holy moment in time between you and God--a special moment that commands humility and reverence.

St. Frances of Assisi

Lord make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we are pardoned,
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

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SESSION 1

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Whereas Matthew and Luke each describe, in its own way, the earthly birth of Jesus, Mark is completely silent concerning that birth. Since the Gospel of John alone speaks of the pre-existence from eternity of Jesus, it seems to be the most effective starting point for our studies. So much information is compacted within these first 18 verses that it gives the impression of someone thinking much faster than can be spoken or written -- somewhat like an overwhelming of the mind. There is so much one wants to write about, but the hand is having difficulty keeping up with the images being conveyed by the mind. Once St. Teresa herself complained in these words: "I only wish that I could write with both hands so as not to forget one thing while I am saying another." After having read verses 1-18 in its entirety, the impression leaves many readers with a sense of vagueness concerning it all -- a sense that here is something very large and very real -- something indescribable in human terms -- it doesn't really want to go into words. (Mine + IB)

The prologue states five of the main themes in this gospel: that of (1) life, (2) light, (3) the world, (4) testimony, and (5) the preexistence of Jesus Christ who reveals God the Father. In origin, it was probably an early Christian hymn. We can find its core in verses 1-5, 10-11, and 14. In its structure, it is poetic. There are short linking phrases in which the last word of one phrase becomes the first word of the next. The prose inserts can be found in verses 6-8 and 15. These inserts deal with John the Baptist. (JBC)

Verses 1 & 2:

- (1) Read John 1:1-2 ()
- (2) Read the following cross-references in their position order (numbered).
 - (1) Genesis 1:1 ()
 - (2) Proverbs 8:22-25 ()
 - (3) Sirach 24:22-27 ()
 - (4) John 17:5 ()
 - (5) Colossians 1:15-20 ()
 - (6) Hebrews 1:1-4 ()
 - (7) I John 1:1-2 ()

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Verse 1

in the beginning -- Jesus is truly the creative Word of God who already existed at the beginning of time. This prepositional phrase is also the first words used in the Old Testament.

was -- The tense of this verb denotes continuous, timeless existence. In this verse it is used 3 times with 3 different meanings: existence (**was** the Word), relationship, (**was** with God), and predication (**was** God).

the Word -- This term combines God's dynamic, creative word (as in Genesis), personified preexistent Wisdom as the instrument of God's creative activity (as in Proverbs), and the ultimate intelligibility of reality (as in Hellenistic philosophy). In Hellenistic thinking the term *logos* (or, the Word) meant divine utterance, emanation, and mediation. This definition is probably most similar to something like divine reasoning, or divine logic -- the divine logic of the order of things. In the Old Testament the word of

God is God's manifestation -- the revelation of himself, whether in creation, in deeds of power and grace, or in prophecy. All these strains of thought are taken up by John, who shows that Christ, the Incarnate Word, is the ultimate and complete revelation of God.

The late OT personification of the Wisdom of God was a Jewish speculation which John has here developed. Another OT concept that he developed is that of the glorification of the Torah (or the Law) in rabbinical Judaism. The identification of Torah with the divine wisdom can be found in Sirach 24:22-27. John's synthesis of these Jewish thoughts with Christian revelation develops the reality that Christ is the true word of God, existing from eternity and that through Christ comes grace and truth. It was Jewish belief that grace and truth came only through the law. That's one of the reasons why they surrounded the Torah with an abundance of legal do's and don'ts.

[with God](#) -- the Greek preposition here signifies communication with another.

[the Word was in God's presence](#) -- The Word existed along with God the Father. Judaism believed this of Wisdom, or Torah.

[the Word was God](#) -- A statement such as this could never have been made in Jewish belief. They would only go so far as to say that Wisdom is the brightness of God, and the Law was his daughter. The word is divine, but he is not all of divinity, for he has already been distinguished from another divine Person. (JBC)

Summary:

There was once a time, not so long ago, that everyone seemed to be thinking, speaking, and writing in terms of evolution. In Jesus' time it was the Logos doctrine which was at the center of thought, and John used this concept when his Gospel was written. It seems that more and more people were beginning to use this concept, even in ordinary conversation. They found it to be a key to understanding many things. One finds it everywhere among the Stoics. There is something very similar to it in the Apocrypha. It was the speech of Philo and the Alexandrians. Furthermore, at the time the Gospel of John was written, it had already crept out of the schools, and could be found among the crowds of ordinary people. Today we think with a totally different series of preconceptions from those of the Jew and Greek of the 1st century. The Greek himself never thought much of "the chosen race", and it was only when the Greek realized that Jesus was not some kind of tribal hero that he accepted Him. To the Greek the thought of a Messiah was strange to him, as it is for many of us today. Furthermore, the term "Logos" is as strange to us as the term "Messiah" was to the Greek.

We still have no adequate terms in which to truly express what we feel to be the permanent significance of Jesus. The terminology of John 1:1-18 represents the best language available in which both Greek and Jew could discover certain convictions that all Christians share:

- (1) Jesus is firmly planted in the center of human history.
- (2) He has brought God and man into a new relationship which is a personal concern of all Christians.
- (3) There is much more in Him that we have not yet accounted for.

Our human language is earthly and does not reach to the heights of divinity. Nevertheless, we keep attempting to speak the language of divinity as best we can, much as the writer(s) of John did when this Gospel was written. (IB)

Verse 2

In verse 2, John insists for the 4th time that the Word was with God at the beginning. Unlike created things there never was a time when the Word was not.

Verse 3:

- (1) Read John 1:3 ()
- (2) Read the following cross-references.
 - (1) Psalm 33:9 ()
 - (2) Sirach 42:15 ()
 - (3) I Corinthians 8:6 ()

Verse 4:

- (1) Read John 1:4 ()
- (2) Read the following cross-references.
 - (1) Psalm 36:9 ()
 - (2) John 5:26 ()
 - (3) John 8:12 ()
 - (4) John 16:33 ()
 - (5) Romans 1:20 ()

Verse 5:

- (1) Read John 1:5 ()
- (2) Read the following cross-references.
 - (1) Wisdom 7:29-30 ()
 - (2) John 3:19 ()
 - (3) John 4:34 ()
 - (4) John 8:12 ()
 - (5) John 9:5 ()
 - (6) John 12:34 (), & 46 ()
 - (7) I Thessalonians 5:4 ()
 - (8) I John 2:6 ()

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Verse 3

All things came to be through him -- John doesn't call Christ the Creator. That is a title that is reserved in the New Testament for the Father. The Word is the instrumental or meditative cause of creation which does not imply any subordination, rather it implies a logical order. The creative Word of God is eminently a Biblical conception. It was identified by the rabbis with Torah, and it was also common in Hellenistic speculation. (JBC)

Without him nothing came to be -- This is an expression of the same truth, only now it is written in the negative. It is emphasized that in distinction to the Word, the creation came into being, and the Word is the cause of this existence. (JBC)

It is declared here that all things without exception were made by him who from all eternity was with God. (IB)

Verse 4

The final words of verse 3 -- **what came to be** -- should be read as the beginning of this verse: **What came to be through him was life**, The meaning is generally taken to be that all created existence has always had its origin in the life of the Word. One might

consider that life is not mere existence for even inanimate objects exist. For John life has a higher meaning, it signifies some kind of sharing in the very being of God. The supernatural life of man is a sharing in the divine life of the Holy Trinity. This is **what came to be** in the Word. The life that men receive from the Word, they receive as God's gift through the One (Jesus Christ) who has manifested Him. (JBC)

this life was the light of the human race --The life of which John speaks, as truly a sharing in the life of God, must be a life of ultimate understanding -- the revelation of God. The rabbis spoke similarly of the Torah as light. Later, John will apply to Jesus other designations such as water and bread that the rabbis also used of Torah. (JBC)

Inasmuch as the Logos created the natural order, there has always been the possibility of seeing in this a divine revelation, as Paul clearly saw in Romans 1:20. The distinctive attribute of the Logos is his life-giving power. This is viewed in its spiritual effects in the human realm.

Life and light are words that are closely associated in OT thought. At the creation the Word of God called light into being that there might be life in the world (Genesis 1:1-3). The psalmist also sings about life and light (Psalm 36:9). Just as all life proceeds from God, so the possibility and the faculty of vision came from him. The light of men means the light which shines for men to give them the means of recognizing the giver of life.

Thus far, the prologue has been concerned with the relation of the Logos to the world. In the following verses the Logos is set forth as the revealer of God in history. These abstractions take on a clearer outline until we come to recognize the protagonists in the life and death struggle between light and darkness. (IB)

Verse 5

the light shines in the darkness -- Darkness is in opposition to light, and by it John habitually means that which is set in opposition to God, the rejection of God, which is natural in a world bound over to sin. Yet **the darkness has not overcome it**. -- Man is in darkness, but he is not darkness itself. Throughout history, God's revealed word has been present for the enlightenment of man -- Therefore mankind did not need to succumb to the darkness, though he invariably did. (JBC) The ethical dualism of light and darkness is paralleled in intertestamental literature, and also in the Dead Sea scrolls. (NAB footnote)

This verse is further explained by verse 9, but the climax is not reached until verse 14, when the divine revelation is announced as the incarnation of the Son of God. The present tense (shines) used here is significant, just as it is in I John 2:8 which reads: ... **for the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining**. For John, the Incarnation was already an event in the past, but the light still shines in the fellowship of the risen and ever-lasting Christ, who is identified with the eternal Logos. The darkness stands for the state of mind in which mankind fails to welcome the light. This spiritual blindness is expressed in the prologue by the phrases "the world knew him not", and "his own people received him not." This is a motif which will recur throughout the Gospel. Light and darkness are conceived here as antagonists. The Gospel is the drama of the conflict between them, issuing in the rejection by the Jews of him who is the light of the world. Yet apparent defeat led to final victory -- "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). (IB)

Summary:

If we peer into the distant past as far as we are able to, we will always come upon God alone. From the beginning-less beginning, there has always been God. And Jesus has always been with Him. He is to God what our own words and thoughts are to us. It is through Jesus that God acts and expresses Himself. It is the Logos who creates--all things that exist were made by Him. All of life speaks to us of the astonishing goodness of God. In ourselves, the Logos is the light of reason, memory, and conscience -- It is also the light of our hunger for God. This light is a gift to us from the Logos. It is a form of proof that He is always striving to break in to us. He is seeking to lead us farther on, deeper in, and higher up!!! Wherever anyone is groping for an encounter with God, however crudely that may be, the effort itself is God-inspired. He is forever seeking to dispel the darkness. He who is Light keeps feeling for the slightest opening in each mind and soul into which he can enter and thus make Himself known to us. (IB)

Verse 6:

Read John 1:6 ()

(1) Matthew 3:1 ()

(2) Mark 1:4 ()

Verse 7:

Read John 1:7 ()

(1) John 1:19-34 ()

(2) John 5:33 ()

Verse 8:

Read John 1:8 ()

(1) John 5:35 ()

Verse 6:

a man named John -- that is, John the Baptist. That this man was sent by God, like the prophets of old and Jesus himself, is what gives relevance to his being mentioned here. (JBC) John was sent just as Jesus was "sent" (4:34) in divine mission. Other references to John the Baptist in this gospel emphasize the differences between them and John's subordinate role. (NAB footnote)

Verse 7:

came ... to testify to the light -- Witness is one of John's fundamental ideas: not only the Baptist (1:19 etc.), but the Samaritan woman (4:39), the works of Jesus (5:36, etc.), the OT (5:39), the crowd (12:17), the Holy Spirit and the disciples (15:26f.), the Father (5:37), and the Evangelist (21:24) all bear witness to Jesus the Word. Though the incarnation is not mentioned explicitly until verse 14, the fact that the Baptist, who is a witness to the Incarnate Word, is introduced at this point shows that the Gospel's writers have been thinking throughout of both his external existence and his incarnate state. (JBC) The testimony theme of John is introduced, which portrays Jesus as if on trial

throughout his ministry.

so that all might believe through him -- Faith, and its converse of unbelief because of the influence of the darkness, is the theme of the first half of the Gospel. (JB)

Verse 8:

John carefully points out, as he does elsewhere, that the Baptist is a witness to the light, and not the light itself. This attitude is motivated not by the Baptist himself, but by the fact that his position had been misinterpreted by some who had not understood that he was the forerunner and not the inaugurator of God's kingdom. (JBC)

Verses 6-8 is a prose comment that has been interjected by the evangelist into the hymn of the Logos. It is the first of a number of passages in which he carefully indicates the inferiority of the Baptist to Jesus. The name John is never distinguished by the title "the Baptist" in this Gospel, as it often is in the Synoptics. Two things are said of him; that he was commissioned by God, and that his mission was limited to testimony. The word **sent** carries the sense of official authority, recalling the OT prophets. This word ("sent") is frequently used in this gospel. The immediate purpose of the mission is to bear "witness to the light" -- its ultimate object is that "all might believe through him." In this Gospel, John (the Baptist) is merely the herald and witness, bearing testimony to the nature and titles of Jesus. We should not think that the Baptist was the prophet and leader of a great movement for national repentance and hope, because he wasn't. The limited mission of the Baptist falls far short of a universal gospel. The testimony of John, according to this gospel, brought to Jesus his first disciples, through whom that apostolic witness went forth which in time was to spread through all the world. It is the fourth Gospel, and not the synoptists, who tells us of this honorable role played by the Baptist in the drama of the world's redemption. John the Baptist was the witness through whom God attested the divine sonship of Jesus (verses 32-34). (IB)

Summary:

There has been an age-long struggle between light and darkness (vs. 5-9). Verse 3 states that "All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be." Of necessity, this means that the darkness was also made by Him. We think in terms of darkness as being a "thing". But might it not also mean the absence of light. This would be similar to the idea of a hole in a sock. Where there is no light, there is a blank that we call darkness. When light appears, darkness vanishes.

Essentially the dark, in this passage, means what shames, soils, and drags a person down. As a rule, progress is slow, and there are horrible relapses; things seem to go round and round, rather than steadily up and on.

Verse 10 reads: **the light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome** (verse 10). In all the world, is there a more amazing thing that the invincibility of goodness? Everything seems against it, yet it refuses to be killed!!! (IB)

Verse 9:

Read John 1:9 ()

- (1) John 3:19 ()
- (2) John 8:12 ()

- (3) John 9:39 ()
- (4) John 12:46 ()

Verses 10-11:

Read John 1:10-11 ()

- (1) None

Verse 12:

Read John 1:12 ()

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| (1) John 3:11-12 () | (5) Galatians 4:6-7 () |
| (2) John 5:43-44 () | (6) Ephesians 1:5 () |
| (3) John 12:46-50 () | (7) I John 3:2 () |
| (4) Galatians 3:26 () | |

Verse 13:

Read John 1:13 ()

- (1) John 3:5-6 ()

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Verse 9:

The true light -- In Hebraic usage, the word “true” pre-eminently characterizes the divine order which is distinguished from the deception and illusion of the order of sinful man. In the sense of perfection, the “true” pertains to a perfect example in the world of reality while any other type of reality is but a pale reflection of it. The Baptist was a light, but he was not the light in the fullness of the meaning of the word “light” -- Only the Word gives this light to all men. (JBC)

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world most probably means that the Incarnation caused light to shine on every human being; thereby bringing a universal revelation. Whereas in the pagan world of the OT many cultures worshipped a variety of gods, but since the Incarnation man has been given the ability to discern what is truth rather than what is not true--in other words, they have been given spiritual discernment to know the difference. (My thoughts) **The true light** may mean the genuine as opposed to the false, or the eternally real in distinction from the transient and illusory reflection of it. (IB)

Verse 10:

“The world”, “this world” in John invariably means the world of men and their affairs, which concretely is a world subject to sin and darkness. John says -- The Word was in the world.

the world did not know him -- These words are not to be restricted to the rejection of Christ by his own people. In John the word “know” does not mean simply to perceive, or to be aware of. Rather in this verse it has the full Semitic sense that is attached to knowledge in which personal involvement is always supposed. In a particular way the history of Israel was characterized by its failure to know the prophetic word of God, and this attitude was to be repeated in their rejection of the word become man. (JBC)

Verse 11:

The statement of the preceding verse is repeated here in other terms, which is now evidently specified to the people of Israel. (JBC) **what was his own** -- literally means "his own property or possession; probably meaning Israel. (NAB footnote) **his own people** -- probably means the Israelites. (NAB footnote)

Verses 9-11 resume the Logos hymn. The Logos as light; that is, as the revealer of God, is seen as entering the world, and by their response to his revelation men stand under judgment. In verse 9, the statement **which enlightens everyone** is potential rather than actual, and must be limited to the qualifications laid down in verse 12. (IB)

Verse 12:

Rejection of the Word was never complete. Both in the OT phase of the history of salvation as well as in the fulfillment in Christ, faith in the Word has been the principle of immortality (cf. Romans 4:1-17), whereby through the acceptance of God's grace men might become children of God. How men become God's children through faith in the Incarnate Word, is the theme of the second half of John's Gospel. This is also the case with the word "believe" found frequently throughout the Gospel.

In Semitic usage the term "name" was equivalent to the person himself. Faith is not simply the acceptance of a proposition, but it is a commitment to a person. The Jewish practice of calling *Yahweh* "the Name" appears to have been imitated in primitive Christian references to Christ. (JBC)

There are those whose response shows that they have "recognized" (or "known") him, and have acted according to that knowledge. **to those who did accept him to ... or to those who believe in his name** divine recognition is given. To believe in his name is to acknowledge his claim that he is the Messiah and Son of God. It was to win acceptance of this demand that the Gospel was written (20:31). In the thought behind John's Gospel, the phrases "to know," "to believe", and "to receive" the light of God in Christ, is the same spiritual activity. (IB)

Privilege follows faith; it doesn't ensure it. To those "who did accept him" and "who believed in his name" **he gave power to become children of God**. The root meaning of the original Greek work shows that "right" or "authority" is better than "power". Rather than any inherent ability on the believer's part, the imparting of a title gives the person a new status (that of "becoming children of God") which has divine authorization. The concepts we find in both Paul's writings and those of John regard this entrance into a family relationship as a gift to be received. Whereas Paul uses a metaphor derived from the Roman law of adoption, John resorts to the Hellenistic symbolism of regeneration -- the birth from above. (IB)

Verse 13:

John emphatically insists that this birth as children of God has nothing to do with human generation, rather it is a special gift of God (cf. 3:3ff.) "Flesh and blood" is an OT, and later Jewish, expression for mankind and human potentialities. Here we are told implicitly that this new birth is that of the Spirit. (JBC)

Therefore, believers in Jesus become children of God not through any of the three natural causes mentioned, but through God as the immediate cause of the new spiritual life. (NAB footnote)

Stress is laid here on the necessity of regeneration as it will later be found in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus (3:3-12). The best illustration of this type of imagery can be found in a product of Hellenistic Judaism in Alexandria, specifically Wisdom 7:1-2. (IB)

While the doctrine of regeneration is an integral part of John's Gospel, the Virgin Birth of Jesus is not. It has been noted that as far back as the 2nd century in some Latin Fathers' writings, and also found in a single manuscript of the Old Latin text of the Gospels (the 5th century codex which now at Verona) the reading "who was born" is found which is evidently a scribe's correction to introduce an allusion to the Virgin birth of Jesus. There is not a single Greek manuscript that contains this reading. (IB) This is not to say that John did not believe in the Virgin Birth, he simply does not make it significant to his purpose. (Mine)

Summary:

In summation, why was it that some people wouldn't have anything to do with Christ? It might be that the divine originality of Christ confused them. They hadn't been expecting someone like Jesus, rather they had been expecting something utterly different. To them Christ did not look the part, and he did not fit God's promises (as they believed them to be) at all. It is a fact that one can brush up against Christ and never recognize him, but push on. One can resent progress, not realizing that it is progress. One can even oppose the incoming of a better way, because it is not the way to which he is accustomed, or the way that was expected. One might disbelieve, because this is not the road by which God used to travel. Therefore the assumption would follow that if he came back to us as the Messiah, this road wasn't the road he would take, and wasn't bound to take. To be open-minded and catholic-hearted, to remember that God's ways are never stereotyped, is a primacy of virtue.

But [he was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not](#) (verse 10). What they were looking for was a leader in social reform and in political adventure. They had small taste for spiritual things; and in a spiritual mission they could see no hope, all which is characteristic of our generation.

Some did not receive him (verse 11). We aren't told the reason why. Perhaps some found life to be full and interesting already, and he got crowded out. Or perhaps he simply did not appeal to them. It's even possible they were not sure He was the real thing. Therefore, they received him not.

On the other hand, the Gospels plainly state that many held aloof from Christ for more sinister reasons. They resented him. They actively disliked him. And what he offered in no way attracted them, so his claims on them upset and irritated them. (IB)

Verse 14:

Read John 1:14 ()

(1) Exodus 16:10 ()

(8) Ezekiel 43:7 ()

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|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| (2) Exodus 24:17 () | (9) Joel 4:17 () |
| (3) Exodus 25:8-9 () | (10) Hebrews 2:14 () |
| (4) Exodus 33:22 () | (11) I John 1:2 () |
| (5) Exodus 34:6 () | (12) I John 4:2 () |
| (6) Sirach 24:4 (), & 8 () | (13) II John 7 () |
| (7) Isaiah 60:1 () | |

Verse 15:

Read John 1:15 ()

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|-------------------|----------------------|
| (1) John 1:30 () | (2) John 3:27-30 () |
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Verses 16-17:

Read John 1:16-17 ()

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| (1) Exodus 31:18 () | (3) John 7:19 () |
| (2) Exodus 34:28 () | |

Verse 18:

Read John 1:18 ()

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| (1) Exodus 33:20 () | (4) John 6:46 () |
| (2) Judges 13:21-22 () | (5) I Timothy 6:16 () |
| (3) John 5:37 () | (6) I John 4:12 () |

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Verses 14-18 contain the essential message of the entire Gospel when we read “The Word became flesh.” This is a repudiation of all Gnostic disparagement of man’s physical nature, for the statement asserts the real humanity of our Lord’s earthly life. Gnosticism was an early Christian religious movement which taught that salvation comes from learning esoteric spiritual truths that free humanity from the material world. They believed that the material world was evil. They didn’t believe that Christ truly had a physical body although He certainly was a spiritual being. They therefore denied the reality of the Incarnation.

John sometimes uses the word “flesh” in contrast to that of “spirit.” We need to understand that the word “flesh” in the Gospel of John does not carry with it the derogatory sense that we often find in Paul’s use of the word. (IB)

Verse 14:

[the Word became flesh](#) -- John now reaches the climax of his hymn in relating what was the ultimate manifestation of God’s Word. “Flesh” is not antithetical of God; but it is all that is transitory, mortal, and imperfect, and at first glance it is incompatible with God. This is the tremendous mystery of the Incarnation, by which the eternal Word took on our exact human nature, becoming one with us in everything except sin (Hebrews 4:15); in everything, that is, except what is not possible with divinity. This is one of the most serious and sobering assertions in the Gospel, the magnitude of which it would be difficult to exaggerate. In order to express this mystery, John has deliberately chosen a word connoting man in his concrete, fallen state. That the Word became man in the fullest possible sense is of the very essence of the Incarnation and of the redemption that

is its result.

and made his dwelling among us -- Literally, this means “he pitched his tent among us.” The Word dwelt for a time in the midst of man as God once dwelt with the Israelites in the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 25:8-9; Numbers 35:34). The verb used here was perhaps deliberately chosen since it reproduces the idea of the original Jewish word which was used in the OT with reference to Yahweh’s presence in the Holy of Holies above the Ark of the Covenant. (JBC) The Greek verb has the same consonants as the Aramaic word for God’s presence (Shekinah). (NAB footnote) “Glory” was another OT term for the presence of God visibly manifested, especially in connection with the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 40:34f.) and the Temple (I Kings 8:11). (JBC) The Incarnate Word is the new mode of God’s presence among his people. (NAB footnote)

When John says that Jesus “dwelt among us”, he is most probably implying more than our English verb suggests. He may have been thinking of the tabernacle in the wilderness where the Lord dwelt with Israel (Exodus 25:8-9; 40:34), and more particularly of that pillar of cloud above the tent of meeting which typified the visible dwelling of the Lord among his people. In later Jewish doctrine the word for this was *sh’kina*, which would suggest to a bilingual Jew the Greek word which translates into the English word “tent.” (IB)

we saw his glory -- Although the Word concealed his glory in becoming flesh, the Gospel is witness to its having been perceived by men. Some scholars have thought that this referred to the transfiguration, at which the disciple was present. While this meaning is by means to be excluded, it would be a mistake to limit John’s meaning to this one instance. It would also be to underestimate the full significance of the word “glory”, which in both the OT (Isaiah 60:1) and in the NT (Mark 8:38; Romans 8:18) means pre-eminently the divine presence in salvation. John’s testimony is to the entire salvific life of the Incarnate Word (I John 1:1). (JBC) The word “glory” is here used to mean God’s visible manifestation of majesty in power, which once filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34) and the temple (I Kings 8:10-11, 27). (NAB footnote)

In many OT passages the “glory of God” suggests a physical radiance while in others (as generally in the NT) it stands (as it does here) for the revelation of the divine character in its perfection. The parallel with I John 1:13 strongly favors the testimony of eyewitnesses to certain events that took place in Galilee and Judea within the first third of the 1st century AD. At the same time the “glory” they beheld was something visible to the eye of faith. The word “we” stands for the Christian witness represented by the apostles whose knowledge of Jesus in his bodily presence was the guarantee that this was truly a revelation of the divine nature. (IB)

the glory as of the Father’s only son -- Now that John has definitively reached the climax of his introduction in speaking of the Word become flesh, he never again calls him the Word. The Gospel is testimony not to the eternal Word but to the Word become flesh, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The glory to which John testifies is now specified -- it is the glory of the only-begotten of the Father. (JBC)

grace and truth -- These words may represent two OT terms describing Yahweh in covenant relationship with Israel (Exodus 34:6), thus God’s “love” and “fidelity”. The Word shares Yahweh’s covenant qualities. (NAB footnote)

“Truth” is one of the watchwords of this Gospel; it occurs over 30 times. In this

passage “truth” means that from the life of God, which alone has reality and permanence, an activity of love has entered human history and brought the gift of eternal life into the present. Jesus is the revealer of the unseen God. He, the Incarnate Word of God, does not only teach. In his whole life, as well as by his lips, he is the living revelation of God. (IB)

Verse 15:

John introduces the witness of the Baptist, as recorded in verse 30. This verse interrupts the flow of the poetry, but it has its place in the development of the prologue. Now that John has spoken explicitly of the Incarnation of the Word, he presents the Baptist as the first of a series of witnesses who testify on behalf of the Christ-event. (JBC)

This verse suggests that while the witness of John the Baptist is part of the continuous testimony of the church, his actual words, spoken in the past, have an enduring significance. (IB)

Verse 16:

from his fullness we have all received -- This “fullness” that we -- the Church -- have shared is that in which the Son is rich, according to verse 14 -- riches being equal to “full of grace and truth.” The mission of the Word into the world was precisely to enable men to become God’s children; that is, to share in the divine life. Thomas Aquinas said that “the personal grace whereby the soul of Christ is justified is essentially the same as his grace by which he is head of the Church and justifies others” (Summa 3.8, 5). He then added that “the interior flow of grace is from none other than Christ, whose manhood, through its union with the godhead, has the power of justifying” (Summa 3.8, 6). (JBC)

Paul wrote in Colossians 2:9 the words: “In him dwells the whole fullness of deity bodily.” If John, like Paul, has a side allusion to the Gnostics’ use of fullness as a technical term, he seizes the opportunity to dismiss their doctrine of the spiritual elite to whom alone the higher knowledge of God was given. This abundance of the divine gift is never exhausted, but is continually being renewed according to our need, “grace upon grace.” (IB)

grace in place of grace -- some versions read “fidelity after fidelity”. What was promised in the covenant with Israel (the second mention of grace in the above phrase) has come superabundantly in the revelation of the Son of God (the first mention of grace). (JBC) This means the replacement of the Old Covenant with the New. (NAB footnote)

Verse 17:

The thought in this verse is that of Hebrew 1:1-4, and it constitutes a final break of John’s thought with that of Judaism. The revelation of the Old Dispensation was but a foreshadowing of what was to be fully revealed in Christ.. The Jewish Midrash on Psalm 25:1 is one of the many passages of the OT where the Hebrew words *hesed* and *‘emet* are joined. *Hesed* can be interpreted as the Greek *charis* (English = grace) as the deeds of God’s love; *‘emet* can be interpreted as Torah. However, John says that although Torah was God’s gift through Moses, the fullness of his revelation has come only through Christ. The theme of the figures which are represented by Moses and the Law, now

fulfilled in the realities coming from Christ, will appear frequently in the Gospel, especially in 6:31-33. (JBC)

Verse 18:

Although the OT often represents God anthropomorphically, that is as being looked upon by creatures, the Jewish belief was firm: God was an invisible God and could not be seen by man. John may be thinking of Exodus 33:2-23, according to which Moses was not permitted to see the glory of God (cf. verse 14), since no one may see God and live, but was allowed to see his back. But in the Incarnate Word God has been revealed completely (Colossians 1:15) -- only the Son sees the Father (6:46), and it is through him that we, too, see God (14:9) with the eyes of faith.

who is at the Father's side -- This phrase denotes complete intimacy, a community of life; it is not without significance that in 13:23 John notes that the beloved disciple was lying close to the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper. (JBC)

The Logos is the "only Son" and God, but he is not Father/God. (NAB footnote)

Jesus is the revealer of the unseen God. In Gnosticism there were those who could impart esoteric "knowledge" which made them "wise" unto salvation. But Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, does not only teach. In his whole life, as well as by his lips, he is the living revelation of God. (IB)

Summary: (IB)

The Incarnation has changed our conceptions of two of the most fundamental of all things -- what God is, and the meaning of holiness. The Law was God-given. Its regulations had been built upon the experience of generations of devoted souls. But Jesus largely ignored it; and here and there, he broke through it at will. From the view of the religious leaders of his day, He was seen as one who distorted the truth about God's laws. In Christ's face we have seen and see God's face: through Christ's life and character we know what the divine nature must be. The essence of Godhead -- that is, what makes God God is a humility that stoops far lower than any man would stoop.

The logos of the Stoics was a pure abstraction, the inspiration of which would touch only the enlightened. The logos of Philo, at best, never stepped beyond the limits of personification. But for Christians "the logos became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we beheld his glory.

Men rose to the Christian conception of God not so much by listening to what he said, but rather by watching him as he lived among them day by day. After all, the teaching, unique though it is, was only a footnote to the main message; and that was his character and life and death. And as they watched, they became sure that God, too, must be like that.

The life in God is rich and ample beyond all description. For anything and everything there is in Christ is ours for the taking and the using; it is pressed eagerly upon us. And God's generosity is inexhaustible and never tires -- He keeps heaping grace on grace upon us, far beyond any calculation. All the saints have felt that. They have been dazzled by it, and often can't comprehend why it should be this way.

Every Christian knows that he himself is not the central figure in his own

biography. What matters, and has mattered in his life is what God is, and what God does. Nothing is of us or our works -- all is of God. All writing comes by the grace of God, and all doing and having.

In verse 17 there is an obvious antithesis between law and grace. Yet the law too is grace. For it was the Logos who inspired Moses to see and teach to others what a glorious thing a human life can be -- to make us shrink back with a shudder from what is mean and dirty. It is true that a religion which does not result in a passion for righteousness, and delights in that result, proves itself to be an imposter.

There is an antithesis. With Jesus Christ something new came into religion, which is here summed up under the two heads of grace and reality. The new religion was effective -- it proved itself. Tested in the most drastic fashion and in the most impossible case -- it worked. Here was a world of solid facts, upon which one could confidently take one's stand. Paul says in Romans 1:16 that he is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith and who will give it a chance.

In Christ, religion gains a new atmosphere. Here salvation is a thing that is not earned, rather it is given. Elsewhere it is assumed that it must be earned. In the NT the central word is "grace." That means what is granted freely, for the taking, for the carrying away, and granted to the undeserving who are known to be undeserving. Christ's bold faith is that this trust in those who have failed will shame them out of themselves, and lift them up above themselves, and make them trustworthy. If you want a man to be big, act toward him as if he is big, and he will rise to it.

None of the big things such as our birth, our health, or the love around us are earned. For example, who earns his wife's, or husband's, affection. It is given of free grace. And salvation, a bigger thing even than that, must be accepted upon these same terms -- as a free gift.

There were villages in which he did amazing things. Why? Because the people there gave him the right atmosphere. They were eager and receptive, and expectant. Therefore their faith and hope came true. Yet there were other villages in which he could do little because he was faced by a blank disbelief that scoffed away their chances. A woman might have jeered something like this: "Mighty works? No, not he. He as the carpenter in the town where I lived before I married. He made that chair you are sitting on now. And all the years I knew him there was never any talk of miracles. Don't you believe a word of it!" So when in that type of atmosphere nothing happened, they gave honor to their own sanity. They were not to be fooled, like those hysterical people they heard about elsewhere. Instead, they possibly spoke words similar to this -- "We said nothing would come of it; and nothing did!"

There is pity to be seen in this. If Christ comes and goes, and we remain just what we were, the blind still blind, the deaf hearing nothing of God's voice. The dead, stone cold and -- still dead!

However skillful a teacher might be, little will come of all his efforts if there is in the pupil no shadowy beginning of an aptitude to which he can appeal and on which he can work. One must be reasonable even toward Christ. The promises are there, and they are true. In the right people they work out, and that to extraordinary lengths.

So many push aside this talk of the fullness that there is in Christ. They assume: "It will not happen to me. To such as myself it simply does not apply. I have imprisoned

myself within a personality from which there is now no escaping. Even Christ cannot change that for me.” But they are wrong.

Most of those who miss it lose the fullness that they could find in Christ because they do not want it, and will not have it. They may think they do. But when the test comes, they discover to their own bewilderment, that like Augustine, they have once again rejected what they were confident they desired and that “the life to which I was accustomed held me more than that other, for which I thought I yearned.” Do we want -- will we take -- will we have -- this fullness that is there for us in Christ? The most real of all realities is the grace heaped upon grace that is there, ours for the accepting, and for the carrying away.

SESSION 2

Last week we saw the way in which the Evangelist opened the Gospel of John. In this session, we will be looking at the ways in which Mark, Luke, and Matthew open their Gospels. Then we will study Luke 1:5-25 in which the birth of John is promised to Zechariah. Reader #1 will now begin reading Mark 1:1.

* * * * *

INAUGURATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH c. 6 B.C. - 30 A.D.

1. Read Mark 1:1 ()
(1) No cross reference

Mark 1:1

- 1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ (the Son of God).

Mark 1:1:

Mark is bringing to us the “good news” of salvation in and through Jesus, crucified and risen, acknowledged by the Christian community as Messiah (Mark 8:29 and 14:61-62) and Son of God (Mark 1:11; 9:7; and 15:39). Some important manuscripts omit the Son of God in this verse which may mean a scribal error when reproducing the text. (NAB)

The use of “good news” in Old English was called “god-spel.” In Greek it was called “evangelion.” In the New Testament the word “good news” is used to mean, not a book, but rather the good news of salvation -- Jesus himself being both the messenger and the message. (JB)

Mark is the only Evangelist who entitles his work as the good news, or Gospel. His use of the word is similar to that in Paul where it can mean either the act of proclaiming the good news, or the content of the good news which is salvation in Christ. Like Paul, Mark identifies the good news with Christ. In calling his book “the Gospel” Mark means that it is not primarily an account about a Jesus, but rather it is a proclamation of the Risen Christ in which he is again made present. What follows is the good news, which re - presents Jesus the Messiah and Son of God in incidents taken from the tradition regarding his earthly ministry through to his resurrection. (JBC)

The gospel does not mean the message delivered by Jesus, rather it is the Christian proclamation of the divine message of salvation through Jesus Christ. It is “the gospel of (or about) Jesus Christ.” In 13:10 and 14:9 it includes incidents from the life of Jesus -- which presumably the apostolic preaching had included from the very beginning. (IB)

Summary:

(IB) This message of salvation through Jesus Christ was good news when it was first proclaimed. It moved up and down the country roads of Galilee and into the city streets of Jerusalem, and men and women were made whole. Jesus said “Follow me”, and men gladly followed him. And as they did their life deepened with new faith and it

became enlarged with new purpose.

It was good news as it went out to the hard Roman world in the 1st century. Down in the ghettos and slums of Greek and Roman cities where life was bound with every conceivable chain, the good news came with a proclamation that lifted men to their feet. It has been good news since that 1st century, going out through the nooks and corners of the globes, until it reaches the last outpost on earth.

The Gospel of Mark as well as that of Matthew, Luke and John has blessed the bed that humanity has lain on -- beds of pain, of sorrow, and of despair. It has come into every human situation and blessed it. It is good news when life unfolds and looks up with aspiration. It is good news when life meets sorrow, when life seems to go to pieces, and it is still the best of good news when life comes to an end here on earth. It is also good news in the secular life we live together when groups begin to clash. To a life that was torn apart by human greed and human passion it is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ in whom "all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17).

Mark is neither intentionally writing history nor biography. He is setting forth the good news of the Son of God. And it was on that which the church was founded. The Gospel that went out to the hard Roman world was not like that world we see pictured on Christmas cards, nor was it like the motto "Peace on Earth" that we often see embroidered on tapestries. Rather it was the affirmation of a Christ who lived, was crucified, and rose from the dead. (IB)

Introductory Comments on Luke 1:1-4

Before continuing with Reader #2, I need to precede the reading with a few comments on Luke 1:1-4. The Gospel of Luke is the only one of the synoptic gospels to begin with a literary prologue. The author takes advantage of a formal, literary construction and vocabulary to write the prologue in imitation of Hellenistic Greek writers, and in so doing, he relates his story about Jesus to contemporaneous Greek and Roman literature. Luke is not only interested in the words and deeds of Jesus, but also in the larger context of the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises of God in the Old Testament. As a second- or even third-generation Christian, Luke acknowledges his debt to earlier eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, but he claims that his contribution to this developing tradition is a complete and accurate account, told in an orderly manner, and intended to provide Theophilus (literally means "friend of God") and other readers with certainty about earlier teachings they have received. (NAB)

This prologue uses a classical vocabulary and construction. It is similar to the formal prefaces of historians during the Hellenistic age. (JB)

Luke introduces his Gospel in the style of Greek classics. He is thus claiming to write a work of literary importance. Critical judgment will agree that he has succeeded admirably on this goal. (JBC)

When an ancient work exceeded the physical limits of a single volume, it was customary to put the preface to the whole at the beginning of the first roll, or codex, and to recapitulate it at the beginning of each subsequent one. Luke adopts this practice here and in Acts 1:1. Thus the prologue must be read as an introduction to Acts as well as to Luke. (IB)

An author's dedication of his work to an individual (who was sometimes a patron who underwrote the cost of its publication) was also a literary convention. The style of the preface conforms to the best Greek model, while that which follows in the first chapter is characteristically Semitic.

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2. Read Luke 1:1-4 in its entirety one time. () NOT NECESSARY NOW
 3. Read Luke 1:1 ()
(1) Acts 1:1 () (2) I Corinthians 15:3 ()
 4. Read Luke 1:2 ()
(1) Luke 24:48 () (3) Acts 1:21-22 ()
(2) John 15:27 ()
 5. Read Luke 1:3-4 ()
(1) None

Luke 1:1-4

- 1 Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us,
- 2 just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us,
- 3 I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus,
- 4 so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

Verse 1:

A reference to **many** authorities was a convention in ancient prefaces. Nevertheless it is clear that the author of Luke-Acts has incorporated a variety of sources and that the adjective (many) is more than just rhetoric. He isn't implying any criticism of earlier narratives; they were only precedents that justified Luke's own venture. (JBC)

Luke wasn't thinking only of those things which were believed; rather he was thinking of the things which had been brought to positive fulfillment. [We have need to remember that the early church had already been established and was in a developmental stage before any of the Gospels were written. The letters in the New Testament were written prior to any of the Gospels, with the Gospel of Mark being the earliest written Gospel.] Luke's stress is upon the life of Jesus as a unique and incomparable event. God had revealed himself. The message of salvation had not been partially or tentatively set forth--rather, it had indeed been accomplished. (IB)

Not only the Gospels but the whole of the New Testament proclaims this conviction that, in Jesus, God has entered into history in a way that was unprecedented and could never be surpassed. According to Paul it was this that "was the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest" (Colossians 1:26). Jesus was more than

an exemplar of heroic virtues. He was more than a teacher of luminous truth. He was the channel of a power by which a new age was ushered in. According to Paul, in Him God “has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred to us the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13); and “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new is come” (II Corinthians 5:17). In His life, death and resurrection, Jesus represented not merely one of the better reflections of the meaning of God. Instead, the faith of the New Testament dared to say: “In him dwells the whole deity, bodily” (Colossians 2:9). For human understanding of the nature of God, Jesus Christ is final. Jesus is final in that the grace of God which came in him can never be transcended. The real finality of Jesus is the gift in him of a life which has an infinite fertility to reach beyond the years in which he lived on earth and reach into the complexities of our modern civilization. Jesus himself never spoke a direct word concerning economic and social problems of our century since they obviously didn’t exist in the century when he lived on earth. The implications of what he was and what he brought to life continue to expand and ripen beyond all estimations. It will be expressed in everyone of life’s triumphs. (IB)

Verse 2:

Luke is drawing not only upon strictly [eyewitness](#) records, but also upon the instructions, prayers, and popular stories through which the [eyewitness](#) accounts were “ministered” in the church. (JBC)

(IB) Many of these “eyewitnesses” were humble people. Their names have long since been forgotten. But they had all contributed to the remembered truth about Jesus which Luke wanted to record.

There was an importance to be found within the humble people as well as those who are counted as great persons. The importance of the original twelve disciples is obvious as well as are those others who are mentioned by name in the Gospels and the book of Acts. But these were only part of the number of those who had seen Jesus, had heard him speak, and had begun to follow him. What the recollections of some of these contributed may have left as great a significance and value as what could be told by the more prominent people. They were also ministers of the word.

When Luke refers to eyewitnesses, there is a foundation here for confidence in the knowledge which has come down to us about the historic Jesus. Form criticism exponents have sometimes tended to produce the idea that the Gospels are made up of vague communal traditions, fragments of sermons about Jesus, and second-hand impressions. But the word “eyewitnesses” which Luke uses here recalls the fact that for many years after the fundamental materials for the Gospels were being gathered, there may have been those who could testify in the words of I John 1:1: “That ... which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our own hands, concerning the word of life.”

A great personality can always leave a vivid impression upon the mind of friends and companions to such an extent that the imprinted picture of the person can be retained and transmitted through many years. How much more than the most distinguished person we ourselves have ever met must be the incomparable fact of Jesus that stamped itself

upon the memories of those who had actually known him and who, for as long as they lived, would keep the story of what he was and what he did from drifting into fantasy or vagueness.

From all that we can learn of it the primitive church was not made up exclusively of simple-minded people who were prepared to accept anything. In such a community, doubtful statements would not easily pass muster, and evidence would be scrutinized. It must never be forgotten that for many years personal disciples of Jesus were still alive and were held in honor. Their testimony was always available on matters of historical fact, and they presented factual information. (IB)

Verse 3:

The phrase **after following up all things carefully** indicates Luke's competence. He made a thorough investigation to make certain of the accuracy of his account which probably required a great deal of research on his part.

In the phrase **from the beginning** Luke goes beyond that of the apostolic kerygma which began with John the Baptist and prefixes his own account with an Infancy Narrative.

most excellent is a title used in honor of a high-ranking government official. One scholar suggests that **Theophilus** was probably not a Christian. He further suggests that Luke was writing a defense of Christianity for the Roman government. Yet it seems this would not be the case since Luke would probably not compose such a theological gospel for a purely apologetic purpose. The name **Theophilus** means "beloved of God." This Greek name has appeared on Jewish inscriptions and papyri from the 3rd century B.C. There is good reason to think that Theophilus was a prominent Christian to whom Luke dedicated his work because Theophilus may have taken upon himself the cost of the parchment, or perhaps performed other service for the church. In this case, the Gospel would actually be intended for the entire church.

an orderly account doesn't necessarily mean a chronological account. It could be geographical or follow a more theological plan according to the successive stages of salvation history. (JBC)

Luke must have been engaged in some measure of research since he states that he began investigating everything accurately. Luke is claiming a better arrangement of the source material rather than greater chronological exactitude in his **orderly account**. **Most excellent** is a title that is given in Acts 23:26; 24:2; and 26:25 to the Roman procurator of Judea. It is also seen frequently in Greco-Roman literature when is written to high government officials. Therefore, the conclusion that Luke is addressing some such individual may be true. (IB)

Verse 4:

The Greek reading could also mean "that you may be more solidly and certainly grounded in the mysteries of salvation." (JBC)

The usual interpretation of this verse is that Theophilus had already received instructions in the faith and that Luke was writing to confirm it. Yet it does remain open to another opinion. If the reports that had reached Theophilus of the new religion were unfriendly, and if Theophilus was a high government official, Luke may have been

seeking in Luke-Acts to come to its defense. This work may have been written to meet incriminating reports or impressions by the presentation of exonerating facts. It is certain that one of the leading interests of Luke-Acts was to show that Christianity was not a politically subversive sect. [The two opposing views mentioned are not intended to weigh heavily on one's mind. There may be a dab of truth in both positions; however, that is not the purpose of our studies. (Mine)]

The truth of the gospel had to do with the facts of the life of the historical Jesus. Luke regarded this as being essential to his writing. He wanted Theophilus and anyone else who read it to know the vivid reality of the Man whom men in Galilee and in Jerusalem knew. Some religions can be indifferent to historical fact, and move entirely upon the plane of timeless truth. Christianity cannot. It rests upon the affirmation that a series of events happened in which God revealed Himself in action, for the salvation of men.

If awareness of the historical Jesus is the beginning of faith, it isn't the end of it. Luke wasn't interested in the narrative of what went on from Bethlehem to Golgotha as a mere chronicle. The history he wrote was also theology -- history with a meaning and an immense significance. He meant to tell of a career that transcended all ordinary categories and brought not merely information to the mind, but transformation of the soul.

The Christ of faith has no existence, is nothing more than noise and smoke, if it is set apart from the reality of the Jesus of history. These two are utterly inseparable in the New Testament. (IB)

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6. Read Matthew 1:1 ()
(1) Genesis 5:1 () (3) I Chronicles 17:11 ()
(2) Genesis 22:18 ()

Matthew 1:1

- 1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Matthew 1:1

The Son of David and the son of Abraham are two links of the genealogical chain that are singled out. David is placed first in order to emphasize the royal Messiah. The mention of Abraham may be due not only to his being the father of the nation Israel, but to Matthew's interest in the universal scope of Jesus' mission. Genesis 22:18 reads: **... in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing.** [Matthew's gospel is aimed at a Jewish audience.] (NAB)

Matthew's purpose for writing the following genealogy is to prove to the Jewish people that Jesus is the rightful Messiah according to Jewish law by showing his descent from Abraham, David, the kings of Judah and from Zerubbabel who was the head of the Jewish community in the post-exilic period. In this first verse of Matthew all of history is gathered up in Christ.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

(IB) The following story may have originally belonged to a collection of legends about John the Baptist that circulated independently of the Christian tradition. There is little in it that demands an assumption of Christian authorship. It is possible that Luke found most of the materials that is now in his first 2 chapters already integrated into one source. Their Semitic style has been regarded by some interpreters as evidence that Luke himself was the translator; however, there is little evidence that the evangelist had any competence as a Semitic scholar. Others have attributed the language and structure of the stories to Luke's own artistic genius. He has deliberately phrased a body of oral tradition in the vocabulary of the Greek Bible and adapted it to the narrative style of the Old Testament. The evidence of familiarity with Jewish custom as well as idiom throughout the first 2 chapters would seem to favor the first suggestion. (IB)

[I would like to add a third suggestion to those already mentioned. In 13:35; 19:43-44; 21:20; and 23:28-31 it is implied that the author was aware of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. Most scholars propose 80 - 90 A.D. as the time in which Luke composed this gospel. My thoughts are that the children of those men and women who had known about Jesus and his disciples, or possibly even some of John the Baptists relatives could have informed Luke concerning the accounts he would be revealing in chapters 1 and 2. This seems to me a more likely assumption since it is not based on any literary style or biblical criticism mechanism, but rather on a person to person encounter with others who would have either known personally about the events, or had relatives who had a personal acquaintance with them. During the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. there were probably many Jewish persons who did escape the fires, and slipped away from its destructive force. If so, Luke could have picked up on the Semitic influences from these sources. Needless to say, he would probably not have relied completely on one person's telling of the events, but would also rely heavily on other people mentioning the same event as well as any tidbits he could obtain from written sources. (MINE)]

A. PREPARATION FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD (c. 6 B.C. - 9 A.D.)

1. INCARNATION OF JESUS THE KING (c. 6 - 5 B.C.)

a. BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST PROMISED

Luke 1:5-25

7. Read Luke 1:5-25 in its entirety one time. () NOT NECESSARY NOW
8. Read Luke 1:5 ()
(1) I Chronicles 24:10 ()
9. Read Luke 1:6 ()
(1) None
10. Read Luke 1:7 ()

- (1) Genesis 18:11 ()
(2) Judges 13:2-5 ()

(3) I Samuel 1:5-6 ()

Luke 1:5-7

- 5 In the days of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the priestly division of Abijah; his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.
- 6 Both were righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and Ordinances of the Lord blamelessly.
- 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years.

Verse 5:

In the days of Herod, King of Judea. Luke relates the story of salvation history to events in contemporary world history. Here he connects his narrative with events in Palestinian history; later he casts the Jesus story in the light of events of Roman history. Herod the Great was the son of the Idumean, Antipater, and he was declared “King of Judea” by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. He didn’t become the undisputed ruler of Palestine, however, until 37 B.C. He continued as king until his death in 4 B.C. (NAB)

Herod the Great was master of the palace for Hyrcanus II, the next to the last Hasmonean (Maccabean) king. Although the Roman Senate had constituted Herod King in 40 B.C., he had to fight his way to the control of Palestine. Gradually, Rome extended Herod’s domain east of the Jordan into Perea, and north as far as Paneas at the base of Mt. Hermon. He actually ruled from 37 - 4 B.C. (JBC)

Luke’s cycle of stories about the births of John the Baptist and Jesus assume both to have been born prior to the death of Herod in 4 B.C. (IB) When Luke writes about **Judea**, this is the term he uses for all of Palestine. (JBC)

The priestly division of **Abijah** is a reference to the 8th of the 24 divisions of priests who, for a week at a time and for 2 times a year, served in the Jerusalem temple (I Chronicles 24:19; II Chronicles 23:8. (NAB)

In his Antiquities (Book 7, Chapter 14, Section 7) Josephus has an account of how this division came to be. The Jewish priests had been divided into 24 “divisions,” for a long time before the events in verses 5-23 took place. Each division was responsible for the conduct of temple worship in Jerusalem for one week at semiannual intervals. (IB)

The name, **Zechariah**, means “Yahweh has remembered.” He belonged to the 8th division of priests who were descended from **Abijah** who was one of the 24 grandsons of the first high priest, Aaron (I Chronicles 24:10). (JBC)

The name, **Elizabeth**, means “God has sworn (to protect us)”. She was a kinswoman of Mary, although the exact relationship is not known (verse 36). The couple had no children. (JBC)

This opening verse is not only similar to Judges 13:2 (LXX), but it also recalls the many great women of Israel who had remained childless for a long time; for example,

Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, the wife of Manoah, and Hannah. (JBC)

Verses 6-7:

Unlike the Pharisees (16:15), they both looked to God for the fulfillment of the promises, and they were always willing to be guided by His will. (JBC).

Although childlessness was looked upon in contemporaneous Judaism as a curse or punishment for sin, it is intended to present Elizabeth in a situation similar to that of some of the great mothers of important Old Testament figures. (NAB)

The piety of the priest and his wife is articulated in negative terms of Jewish legalism. We can compare this with Paul's boast in Philippians 3:6: "in zeal I persecuted the church, in righteousness based on the law I was blameless." Like Abraham and Sarah, they were childless and advanced in years. Although the story is couched in negative Jewish legalism terms, at the same time it makes clear that their childlessness was not a consequence of divine displeasure. (IB)

Summary:

(IB) In these 3 verses there are three names mentioned: Herod, Zechariah, and Elizabeth. The last two were vastly different from the first. Herod was one of the most evil figures of his age. He was cruel, sensual, and he had no standard of judgment higher than his own relentless will for power. He was the complete opposite of Zechariah and Elizabeth who were quiet, inconspicuous, and yet far more important than Herod ever was. They were the sound core of their society, and they gave to it a real sense of wholesomeness. They were humble people in whom could be seen the strength of the present and the promise of the future life.

The division which arose in the 1st century between the new Christian fellowship and the Jewish church from which it was gradually separated sometimes led to what was in danger of being disparagement of the old religion. The fact that the Pharisees were condemned created the impression that Judaism in general stood condemned. [Not true] It needs to be remembered that it was out of the heritage of Israel that Jesus himself came, and that there was in Judaism a spiritual force which would produce souls that were accounted righteous before God [as were Zechariah and Elizabeth]. (IB)

11. Read Luke 1:8 ()
(1) None

12. Read Luke 1:9 ()
(1) Exodus 30:7 ()

Luke 1:8-9

8 Once when he was serving as priest in his division's turn before God,
9 according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the Sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense.

Verses 8-9:

It was decided by lot which of the 800 priests of the division of Abijah would have the privilege each day of offering incense in the Holy Place, the first of two rooms which constituted the Tabernacle (Exodus 30:1-9). This would have been the highest point of Zechariah's priestly life. (JBC)

(IB) It was the priest's duty to keep the brazier burning that stood on the altar of incense in front of the Holy of Holies. He would also supply it with fresh incense once before the morning sacrifice, and again after the evening sacrifice.

Very few churches in the Protestant faith even think of using incense while those in the Catholic faith are quite familiar with its use. Incense has been burned by an unending succession of priests of the Lord. Symbolic acts that are an aid to worship should never be dismissed lightly.

The use of incense in worship services is very ancient and very widespread. It was incorporated from pagan ideas into Jewish worship as a symbol of the ascending prayers of souls that reach up to God.

When Zechariah went into the temple on this particular day, he was carrying out the customs of worship which were already centuries old. Forms of worship change, as they should, as a means of helping people to worship in the truest and fullest way. Leaders of worship must learn to recognize the instinctive needs of the human personality for methods of devotion which wake the whole human organism. Mankind is not "pure" spirit and he is not of "pure" spiritual acts. Needless to say, the outward elements in worship must always be understood as subsidiary, and they must never be allowed to become so large in importance that they overshadow the supreme matter which is the direct awareness of God himself.

Summary:

(LToJC) It was the morning sacrifice of the day. As the representatives of Israel, the Levites on ministry, and those of the laity whose "division" it was to serve had already arrived to offer their services in a sacrifice provided by, and offered for, all Israel. A Priest was positioned on the highest pinnacle of the Temple, and as he watched the first blush of dawn arise he would give the signal for beginning the services of the day. At this time the massive Temple gates would slowly swing open on their hinges while there would be a three-fold blast from the silver trumpets of the Priests which would seem to awaken all the citizens of Jerusalem--summoning them to morning sacrifice. Yet in the court below, the Levites and priests had already been busily engaged in their duties for quite some time.

Prior to this summoning of the morning sacrifice, the superintending Priest had summoned to their sacred functions those who had "washed" according to the law. Since daylight had not yet entered the premises, some of them had been divided into two teams to make an inspection of the Temple courts by candlelight. Each day there must have been around fifty priests on duty. If we calculate the total number in the 24 divisions of at 20,000 according to Josephus, which is very much below the exaggerated Talmudic computation of 85,000 for the smallest division. Then if we also suppose that only a little more than one-third of each division had come up for duty, this would give fifty priests for each week-day, while on the Sabbath the whole division would be on duty. This is

considerably more than the number required, since, except for the incensing priest, the lot for the morning sacrifice held good for that of the evening sacrifice as well.

Soon all the priests would meet in the Hall of Hewn Polished Stones where formerly the Sanhedrin had sat. It was there that the ministry of the day was apportioned. To prevent any disputes among those present, the lot was to assign to each person their duties. The lot was to be resorted to twice before the Temple gates were opened, and then twice again after the gates had been opened. The first act of their ministry (the first time the lot was cast) had to be done in the grey dawn, by the wavering red light that glowed on the altar of incense within the Holy Place, before the priests had stirred it into fresh flame.

It was scarcely daybreak, when for a second time they met for the "lot," which designated those who were to take part in the sacrifice itself, and those who were to trim the golden candlestick, and make ready the altar of incense within the Holy Place. Nothing now remained to be done before the admission of worshippers except for bringing out the lamb who was once again to be inspected for its fitness for sacrifice. The priests would then water it from a golden bowl, and then lay it in mystic fashion (as tradition described the binding of Isaac) on the north side of the altar, with its face to the west. All the priests and laity on duty were present. On the east side of the altar stood the Priest who, from a golden bowl, he sprinkled with sacrificial blood two sides of the altar, below the red line which marked the difference between ordinary sacrifices and those that were to be wholly consumed.

While the sacrifice was prepared for the altar, the priests had made ready everything within the Holy Place, where the most solemn part of the day's service was to take place -- that of offering the incense, which symbolized Israel's accepted prayers. Then the lot was once again cast, for the third time, to indicate who was to be honored with this highest mediatorial role. Only once in a lifetime might any one enjoy this privilege. It was customary for the casting of the lot to be preceded by prayer and confession of their faith on the part of the assembled priests.

Within this group surrounding the superintending Priest was one who was at least sixty years of age--by name, Zechariah. Never had he ever been honored with the office of incensing. Yet he must have been well known in the Temple since he had been going there on ministry twice a year, every year, since adulthood. Unlike the Levites, the priests were not disqualified by age; they were only disqualified by infirmity.

In many respects he was different from those around him. His home was not in either of the great priest-centers (the Ophel-quarter in Jerusalem, or in Jericho). Instead he lived in some small town in the uplands south of Jerusalem--the hill-country of Judea. He could claim twofold honor though since (1) he was a priest and (2) he was married to the daughter of a priest.

-
13. Read Luke 1:10-12 ()
(1) None

Luke 1:10-12

- 10 Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of

- the incense offering,
11 the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense.
12 Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him.

Verses 10:12:

The phrase [the angel of the Lord](#), in the Old Testament was often a way that the presence of God was expressed. (JBC)

Even within each division, priests were so numerous that the privilege of performing any significant sacred act was awarded by lot. To burn incense was therefore an honor that might not often be bestowed on any member of the priestly order, and the occasion would be one of particular solemnity for Zechariah. The traditional formula of public prayer at such times was: “May the God of mercy enter the sanctuary and be pleased to accept the sacrifice of his people.” (IB)

A sudden and unexpected consciousness of the reality of God can overwhelm a soul with awe. When the angel appeared to Zechariah, [fear came upon him](#).

Summary:

On that morning in the Temple, for the first and last time the lot had selected Zechariah for the task of incensing. As he patiently waited outside the Holy Place, his every thought must have been fully concentrated on the task before him. His full attention would be required for performing each minute detail of his office. His first chore was to choose two persons to assist him in his sacred service. One would enter the Holy Place and reverently remove what had been left on the altar from the previous evening’s service. He would then withdraw backwards in an attitude of prayer. The other person would then advance into the Holy Place and spread the live coals which had been taken from that of the burnt-offering, making certain he had spread the coals to the utmost boundary of the golden altar. In a worshiping posture, he would then also retire backwards.

Meanwhile the background sounds would be those of the organ (the Magraphah) which summoned priests, Levites, and the people. This was the innermost part of the worship of the day. The celebrant Priest, which in this case was Zechariah, would carry the golden censer and stand alone within the Holy Place, which was lit only by the glow of the seven-branched candlestick (the Menorah). In front of him was the golden altar of incense. This was placed before the heavy veil that hung before the entrance to the Holy of Holies. On the altar of incense the red coals glowed.

To the right, which would be the left of the altar (the north side) was the altar of shewbread, and to the right of the altar (the south side) was the golden candlestick. As instructed, Zechariah waited until a special signal indicated that the moment had come for him to spread the incense on the altar, and as near as possible to the Holy of Holies.

Outside the priests and the people had already reverently withdrawn from the neighborhood of the altar, and were prostrate before the Lord, offering unspoken worship, recalling past deliverances and longing for the mercies promised in the future. Their personal entreaties were for present blessings and grace. The ingredients of the incense seemed to rise in a fragrant cloud of praise and prayer.

Inside the Holy Place Zechariah stood alone. A deep silence had fallen on the

worshippers outside as they watched to heaven the prayers of Israel as they ascended in the cloud of odors that rose from the golden altar. Zechariah patiently waited until he saw the incense burning. He would then have bowed down in worship and reverently withdrawn if not for the wondrous sight he saw before him which arrested his steps.

On the right side of the altar (the South) between it and the golden candlestick stood what appeared to Zechariah to be an angelic form. Never before had tradition reported such a vision to an ordinary priest in the act of incensing. The only visions that had been reported was those of the high priest, never an ordinary priest such as Zechariah was.

There was always an uneasiness felt by the people on the outside when any mortal approached the immediate Presence of God, and every delay in the priest's return seemed ominous to them. It is no wonder then that Zechariah was troubled with fear.

The angel's appearance probably occurred just after Zechariah had completed the spreading of the incense on the altar, and was preparing to offer his own parting prayer. Before bowing his head in prayer Zechariah's attention was captured by the form of the angelic being.

Psychologically, this narrative holds true. If it had been one of apocryphal writings, it would have been painted with content that portrayed Zechariah's feelings, and the language of the Angel. If of an apocryphal nature it would also have begun by referring to Zechariah's prayers for a coming Messiah, and Zechariah would have been represented as being in a highly enthusiastic state. There would also have been a burst of prosaic objection which Zechariah would have offered to the Angelic announcement as well as a burst of spiritual sentiment. Since the characteristics of apocrypha writing is not present in this narrative, it is most probably an accurate account of what did actually happen on that morning long ago when Zechariah was chosen by lot for the task of incensing the altar.

14. Read Luke 1:13 ()
(1) Luke 1:57 () & 60 () & 63 ()
15. Read Luke 1:14 ()
(1) None
16. Read Luke 1:15 ()
(1) Numbers 6:1-21 () (3) I Samuel 1:11 (LXX) ()
(2) Judges 13:4 () (4) Luke 7:33 ()
17. Read Luke 1:16 ()
(1) None
18. Read Luke 1:17 ()
(1) Sirach 48:10 () (4) Matthew 11:14 ()
(2) Malachi 3:1 () (5) Matthew 17:11-13 ()
(3) Malachi 3:23-24 ()

Luke 1:13-17

- 13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John.
- 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,
- 15 for he will be great in the sight of (the) Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb,
- 16 and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.
- 17 He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord.”

Verse 13:

Do not be afraid is a stereotypical Old Testament phrase spoken to reassure the recipient of a heavenly vision. (NAB)

This phrase often introduces a great redemptive act of God. (JBC)

You shall name him John. The name “John” means “Yahweh has shown favor,” which is an indication of John’s role in salvation history. (NAB)

Verse 14:

joy and gladness -- This is a phrase that is indicative of the Messianic age. (JBC)

The **many** who are to share the father’s joy are John’s future adherents, although Luke and his readers would also have included the Christian church. They will **rejoice** that such a person has been born into the world. (IB)

Verse 15:

He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. Like Samson (Judges 13:4-5) and Samuel (I Samuel 1:11--LXX), John is to be consecrated by Nazirite vow and set apart for the Lord’s service. (NAB) The boy will be dedicated as a Nazirite before birth (Numbers 6:1-21). An even more important feature of the Nazirite was the provision of not cutting his hair (Judges 16:17; I Samuel 2:11), which is not mentioned of John. The Nazirite vow was rather vague in history and it could have taken different forms at different times, like perhaps that of the ascetical life practiced by the community at Qumran. (JBC)

filled with the Holy Spirit -- This reference is not to the third person of the Holy Trinity. It should be understood that John was filled with “a” Holy Spirit. This phrase is simply referring to God as exerting extraordinary salvific power. (JBC)

he will be great in the sight of (the) Lord -- means “in God’s estimate.”

According to Numbers 6:3, Nazirites were forbidden the use of wine or strong drink. Strong drink is an inclusive term for intoxicating beverages other than that which comes from grapes. If this prediction means that John was to be a Nazirite one must notice that it is not said that he would allow his hair to grow uncut. Perhaps an expression that is found in Ephesians 5:18 is intended here: “Do not get drunk with wine ... but be filled

with the Holy Spirit.” In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was only a temporary gift of God, even to the most exceptional person. (IB)

from his mother’s womb -- this probably means “while he is still unborn.” (IB) Like another Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5). This statement proclaims that every action of John was instituted and sustained by God. There was no one better to be “forerunner” of the fulfillment of Jesus. (JBC)

Verses 16-17:

He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah means that John is to be the messenger sent before Yahweh as described in Malachi 3:1-2 (LXX). Moreover, he is cast in the role of the Old Testament fiery reformer, the prophet Elijah, who according to Malachi 3:23 (LXX), (4:5) is sent before “the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.” (NAB).

The attribution of Elijah’s spirit to John is distinctly avoided by Luke. Jewish tradition expected the return of Elijah before the Day of the Lord. The combination of spirit and power occurs in some manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran and housed today in the Dome of the Book in Israel. The idea seems to be that the people will no longer be proud, independent “fathers,” but rather devoted, obedient “children.” A parallel can be seen here between fathers (the disobedient) and sons (the wisdom of the just). (JBC)

bring back -- The reference may be to the priestly role of reconciliation or else to the Exodus theme of coming back to the promised land. (JBC)

John will not only perform the ancient function of a prophet, but will also make the people ready for God’s rule as predicted of God’s forerunner in Malachi 4:5-6. He will be one who exhibits the characteristics of Elijah in spirit and power. (IB)

Summary:

(IB) Greatness as God sees it is the greatness promised for the son of Zechariah -- this greatness is linked with eternal purposes of redemption, who will make himself an obedient instrument for these. As a grown man John had a flaming conviction within himself that had been caught up into communion with the purposes of God. He had a message within which burned like fire and would not let him rest until it was delivered. John would be a ready instrument: self-controlled and clean. Into this vessel God’s Holy Spirit came completely. (IB)

But let’s return to the Temple for now. This child John of whom the angel spoke was to be the source of joy and glory to a far wider circle than that of the family. From the inception of life, John would be consecrated and belong wholly to God, for His work. For this life-long work he would be filled with a Holy Spirit from the moment when life woke within him in the womb.

In that Holy Place as he stood before the angel, Zechariah had become overwhelmed with the angel’s words. The words which he heard must have filled him with such bewilderment that he could scarcely comprehend their meaning. The idea of a son which had for so long been in his consciousness was to actually become a reality, and so many other marvelous things were to be connected with his son that his mind was whirling from so much magnificent news.

It was the duty of the officiating priest to offer a prayer on behalf of the people after the incense had been kindled. Thus far no mention has been made of this personal petition by Zechariah. (IB)

19. Read Luke 1: 18 ()

(1) None

20. Read Luke 1:19 ()

(1) Daniel 8:16 ()

(2) Daniel 9:21 ()

21. Read Luke 1:20 ()

(1) Luke 1:45 ()

Luke 1:18-20

18 Then Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.”

19 And the angel said to him in reply, “I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news.

20 But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time.”

Verse 18:

[How shall I know this?](#) Zechariah’s question is similar to that of Abraham’s (Genesis 15:3-5). To seek a sign is in accord with biblical practice. At times, God even volunteered a sign without being asked to do so. Zechariah’s consequent punishment is, therefore, very surprising. We also sense something of ecstatic joy, too overwhelming for words. This is the impression left with the people in verse 22. (JBC)

Zechariah is incredulous and wants some proof that the promise is fulfilled. He had already prayed for many years without any conviction that his prayers would be answered. (IB)

Verse 19:

The angel now identifies himself as [Gabriel](#). Gabriel is the angel who announced the 70 weeks of years to Daniel (Daniel 9:24), the final eschatological struggles, and the messianic consecration of the Holy of Holies (Daniel 9). Like Zechariah, Daniel was also frightened by Gabriel’s appearance and was told not to fear (Daniel 10:7, 12). Daniel was also struck dumb, like Zechariah, but his speech was shortly restored (Daniel 10:15f.). (JBC)

His name means “God is my hero”. (JBC) [Cut and paste comments from verse 11 here.] Gabriel is one of the seven archangels who stand in the presence of God (Revelations 1:4; Tobit 12:15). His words had deserved credence and would [be fulfilled](#), but the sign that Zechariah had requested would also be a punishment for unbelief. (IB)

Verse 20:

[you will be speechless and unable to talk](#) -- Zechariah's becoming mute is the sign given in response to his question. When Mary asks a similar question in verse 34, unlike Zechariah, who was punished for his doubt, she, in spite of her doubt, is praised and reassured (vss. 35-37). (NAB)

Summary:

Obvious doubt would suggest itself to Zechariah's mind, especially after so many years of having prayed for a son with no results. He was probably even not aware of having spoken aloud. Yet, there was in his words an element of faith also, or at least of hope, as he asked for some pledge or confirmation of what he had heard.

Zechariah's dumbness would also become a sign to the waiting multitude in the Temple. It would be a sign to Elizabeth, a sign to all who knew him in the hill-country, and also a sign to Zechariah himself during those nine months of retirement and inward solitude. Furthermore, it would be a sign that would kindle into a fiery flame on that day when God would loosen his tongue.

22. Read Luke 1:21-24 ()

(1) None

23 Read Luke 1:25 ()

(1) Genesis 30:23 ()

Luke 1:21-25

- 21 Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary.
- 22 But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was gesturing to them but remained mute.
- 23 Then, when his days of ministry were completed, he went home.
- 24 After this time his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months, saying,
- 25 "So has the Lord done for me at a time when he has seen fit to take away my disgrace before others."

Verse 23:

[he went home.](#)-- Zechariah lived in the tribal portion of Judah (verse 30). An ancient tradition localizes his home at 'Ain Karim, about 4 miles from Jerusalem in a valley leading into the Shephelah. (JBC)

Verses 21-23:

When he had burned the incense, the officiating priest was expected to come out of the sanctuary and bless the assembled worshipers. Zechariah's inability to perform this function upon his tardy reappearance was correctly interpreted by the impatient

congregation as evidence [that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary](#). Zechariah's time of service would end with the Sabbath. Priests were at liberty to live anywhere in Judea when not on duty. Zechariah's place of residence is vaguely described in verse 39 as a Judean city in the "hill country." (IB)

Verse 24:

[went into seclusion](#) -- Did Elizabeth hide herself for the same reason that her husband was speechless? (JBC) [Perhaps they both were so overcome by joy at such an unbelievable event that they wanted to be secluded from everyone around in order that they might meditate without interruption about everything that had already taken place, and what would take place in the future. -- Mine]

Verse 25:

[disgrace](#) -- During Old Testament times, for a woman to remain childless was considered a reproach upon the woman. It was believed that the woman was sterile, never the man. (JBC)

Verses 24-25:

Nothing is known of any ancient custom that required an expectant mother to seclude herself. Childlessness was considered a reproach among Semitic peoples. Sterility was always blamed in the Old Testament on the woman.

Summary:

A period of unusual length had passed since Zechariah had first entered the Holy Place and since the signal for incensing had been given. The prayers of the people had been offered, and their anxious gaze was directed towards the Holy Place. At last Zechariah emerged to take his stand on the top of the steps which led from the Porch to the Court of the Priests. He was to take the lead in the priestly benediction that preceded the daily meat-offering and the chant of the Psalms of praise which was accompanied with the joyous sound of music, as the drink offering was poured out. Already the sign of Zechariah was to be a sign to all the people. The pieces of the sacrifice had been ranged in due order on the altar of burnt-offering. The priests were standing on the steps of the porch, and the people were waiting. Zechariah attempted to speak the words of benediction, not aware that he could not speak. The people knew by his silence that he had seen a vision in the Temple. Yet, as he stood there helplessly trying by signs to indicate it to the awestruck crowd, he remained dumb. (LToJC)

The priests and people dispersed in wonder at what had just taken place. The day's service was over, and another family of ministers would take the place of those who had participated with Zechariah in the day's services. Then at the close of the week's service, another division would come on duty -- the division of Abia. Each returned to their own home.

In regards to the social aspects of the religious leaders in that day, Zechariah would not have been one of the "learned" nor would he have been considered a model priest by the Rabbi's. They would have described him as an "idiot," or common, rustic priest, and would have treated him with benevolent contempt throughout the time he was

in the temple.

The angelic apparition which had appeared before him was entirely unprecedented, and did not lay within the range of common expectations, although the possibility, or rather the fear, of some contact with the Divine was always present to the popular mind.

The invention of such a vision in such circumstances would be difficult to explain if it were not true. A suggestion of this narrative would never have entered the mind of the people of that time. It is too absurd to even think of it as being fantasy. [LToJC]

According to Jewish opinion, Elijah was to appear personally as the forerunner of the Messiah, and not simply in spirit and power as John does. Nowhere in Judaism was Elijah designated as one “to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.” From whatever source the narrative was derived, its details differ in almost all the particulars from the theological notions that were current at that time. The more Zechariah meditated on this in the long solitude of his enforced silence, the more fully must new spiritual thoughts have come to him.

As for Elizabeth, the deepest secret of motherhood was intensely deepened and sanctified in the knowledge of all that had passed. She was content with, perhaps even felt the need for, absolute retirement from others so she could have undisturbed fellowship with God and her own heart. Like her husband, she also would be alone and silent--until another voice called her forth.

The removal of her barrenness, its manner, its meaning, and its end were all from God, and with God. It was quite fitting to be quite alone and silent, until God’s voice would awaken the echoes within. Therefore, five months passed in absolute retirement.

SESSION 3

Last week we saw the way in which the synoptic evangelists (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) opened their Gospels. We also studied the way in which Luke spoke about the birth of John as it was promised to Zechariah. This week we are going to be studying the announcement of the birth of Jesus, Mary's visit to Elizabeth, and Mary's Canticle, also known as the Magnificat. We will begin by asking our 1st reader to start the session with a reading from Luke 1, verses 26 and 27.

* * * * *

b. ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS Luke 1:26-38

1. Read Luke 1:26-38 entirely through one time.
2. Read Luke 1:26
(1) No cross reference
3. Read Luke 1:27
(1) Matthew 1:16, 18f. (2) Luke 2:5

Luke 1:26-27

- 26 In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth,
27 to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.

26:

In the sixth month means that this was the 6th month of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

Gabriel was also the angel who spoke God's promises to Zechariah in the Temple. He had also been the instrument of revelation to Daniel (Daniel 8:16; 9:21).

Nazareth is an insignificant town which is never mentioned in the OT, in the Talmud, or by Josephus. (JBC)

It was despised by the Palestinians of Jesus' own time (John 1:46), and it was inhabited by jealous, material-minded people (Luke 4:23-30). It is identified as a town of Galilee for the benefit of Gentile readers who were unfamiliar with the geography of Palestine. (IB)

In fact the learned Rabbis spoke in contempt of the Galileans and they loathed the unlettered country people. Mary and Joseph fell into this class of people in the minds of the religious leaders of that day. To picture a Messiah as being born of a virgin in Galilee who was also betrothed to a humble workman was not in the mental conceptions of contemporary Judaism. The family in Nazareth was a typical Israelite household. The scantiness of details the Gospels supply may very well have been intentional to prevent human interest from overshadowing the grand central Fact. And that is where attention needs to be directed. (LToJC)

Verse 27:

betrothed -- from the moment Mary had become the betrothed wife of Joseph their relationship was sacred, just as if they had already married. Yet months might pass before they were ever formally married. (LToJC)

of the house of David -- modifies Joseph, not Mary. The tradition of Jesus' Davidic descent was manifestly based on Joseph's lineage. In the birth stories, Joseph plays a much more important role in the Gospel of Matthew than he does in Luke. (IB)

virgin -- Mary means "exalted one." In Hebrew it is "Miryam". Joseph, seems to have been of Judean stock, possibly an inhabitant of Bethlehem. Through Joseph, as Jesus' legal father, and not through Mary, did Jesus inherit a claim to the Davidic throne. (JBC)

4. Read Luke 1:28

(1) Judges 6:12

(3) Judith 13:18

(2) Ruth 2:4

5. Read Luke 1:29

(1) No cross reference

Luke 1:28-29

28 And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you."

29 But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Verse 28:

Hail, favored one -- the word "grace" (in Greek *charis*) is associated in Luke with joy (Greek *chara*) and wisdom (Greek *Sophia*). These Greek verbs imply instrumentality rather than fullness. Luke's choice of words puts the emphasis upon the source of goodness rather than upon its effects. In regard to Mary, therefore, he points out that she is the object of God's grace and favor. Mary is also shown to have been chosen for a long time past. God's full favor has already been concentrating upon her. The Hebrew form of salutation would be "Peace to you." Mary, more than any other human being in the Bible, is the recipient of the most impressive salutations. In Mary, more than in anyone else, God's messianic fulfillment is achieved. As such, she has received more -- from and through God's anticipation of Jesus' redemptive work -- than anyone else in the OT or in the NT. (JBC)

There is sporadic support in early Christian literature for the view that the angel's utterance marked the moment of Mary's conception. However, that view is incompatible with the future tenses in verse 35. (IB)

The Lord is with you -- Although this phrase can be a simple greeting, as it is in Ruth 2:4, it still comes from God, and implies a particular office or special privilege. Luke does not speak of any vision, but rather of a communication of a message. The Bible has spoken of angelic mediators at other great moments of salvation history (Genesis 16:10; Exodus 3:2; 33:2f.). During the time of Jesus' birth, there was

widespread popular devotion to angels among the Jews. This can be attested to by reading the apocalyptic or haggadic books of the Bible, such as Daniel, Zechariah, and Tobit as well as extra biblical literature of the time as can be read in the Dead Sea Scrolls. (JBC)

Verse 29:

troubled ... and ... pondered -- The Greek verb used here implies intense, prolonged reflection which activates a strong spirit of faith.

Although the awe of the Supernatural visit must have fallen upon Mary, it wasn't so much the sudden appearance of mysterious stranger that startled her as it was the words of his greeting which implied un-thought of blessings. The designation of **avored one** came upon her with bewildering surprise, perhaps not so much from its contrast to the humbleness of her estate, as from the self-conscious humility of her heart. The expectations of the religious leaders of the day was such that spiritual influences were to rest exclusively among those who were either mighty, or rich, or wise. In fact, the total opposite of the couple whom God chose to be the Holy Parents of Jesus. (LToJC)

6. Read Luke 1:30

(1) None

7. Read Luke 1:31

(1) Genesis 16:11

(3) Isaiah 7:14

(2) Judges 13:3

(4) Matthew 1:21-23

8. Read Luke 1:32-33

(1) II Samuel 7:12, 13, 16

(2) Isaiah 9:7

9. Read Luke 1:33

(1) Daniel 2:44

(3) Micah 4:7

(2) Daniel 7:14

(4) Matthew 28:18

Luke 1:30-33

30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

31 Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.

32 He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father,

33 and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Verse 31:

Jesus -- is the Greek equivalent of the Semitic "Joshua" which means "the Lord is salvation."

Verse 32:

Mary's future son is described in language that is ordinarily reserved for God's redeeming presence among his people. The boy will grow up to be **great** (Tobit 12:22; Psalm 48:2; Psalm 86:10; Psalm 96:4), and he will be called **Son of the Most High** (Genesis 14:19ff.; Sirach 24:2). One might wonder whether or not Mary understood the angel was speaking an announcement that her son would be divine, the 2nd person of the Holy Trinity. We must recall that Luke is not giving a diary of the day of the annunciation but a gospel of salvation. Second, Mary (as a Semite) was not accustomed to think in later philosophical terms of person and nature and would have been impressed with the dynamic thrust of divine power and infinite goodness in the words and works of Jesus. Even after Pentecost the apostles thought in this way (Acts 2:33-36; Acts 3:26; Romans 1:4). Third, there are indications that before Pentecost Mary did not fully appreciate the divine mission of her son (Luke 2:48-50). Therefore, Mary **pondered** ever anew the words and works of Jesus during his lifetime. Through the light granted by the Spirit at Pentecost, she plumbed ever deeper into the realization that nowhere as in her son Jesus was God so dynamically and personally at work saving the world. (JBC) Verses 32-33:

Jesus is to be the Davidic Messiah of popular Jewish hope. The angel's words recall the predictions of II Samuel 7:13-16 (cf. Psalm 2:7; Psalm 89:26-27) and Isaiah 9:6-7.

10. Read Luke 1:34
(1) None
11. Read Luke 1:35
(1) Matthew 1:20

Luke 1:34-35

- 34 But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?"
- 35 And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.

"How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" -- From the OT we could never conclude to the virginal conception of the Messiah with the exception of possibly Isaiah 7:14. Mary's previous espousal to Joseph indicates she looked forward to a normal married life. Yet her question to the angel raises the objection of virginity. By those who accept Mary's question as genuinely historical, instead of documented apostolic preaching, upon which our faith rests, various solutions have been proposed. (1) Mary, understanding the angel to imply an immediate conception, objected that marriage relations were not allowed until the year of espousal was completed. (2) A commonly held opinion among Catholics holds that Mary had made a vow of perpetual virginity even before her espousal to Joseph; and Joseph accepted marriage under this most unusual condition. (3) Others maintain that Mary decided upon perpetual virginity at the

time of the annunciation, either because of the demands of Isaiah 7:14, or because of the impelling necessity of the mystery of the divine maternity. (JBC)

[will overshadow you](#) -- The Spirit's overshadowing of Mary reminds us of the Jerusalem Temple (Exodus 40:35; I Kings 8:10; Haggai 2:6-9).

In verse 35, the angel explains to Mary the theory of supernatural conception. Mary is astonished that she is to have a son before her marriage. Some Roman Catholic interpreters have discovered support in this verse for their dogma that Mary had taken a vow of perpetual virginity: [since I have no relations with a man](#) declares her intention of remaining a virgin as much as it describes her present status. Protestant scholars, on the other hand, raise the question: "Why, then, had she become betrothed to Joseph?" (IB)

Ecclesiastical history has often been discreditable with its dissensions and divisions, but there is a power of attraction in Christ which is increasingly drawing people from all nations together. There is in Him a reign of love and forgiveness that has been inaugurated which molds the hearts and lives of all believing people. It is calling us to find our common center and desire in Him, and then discover that real community for which all mankind is longing. (IB)

12. Read Luke 1:36

(1) None

13. Read Luke 1:37

(1) Genesis 18:14

(3) Matthew 19:26

(2) Jeremiah 32:27

14. Read Luke 1:38

(1) None

Luke 1:36-38

36 And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren;

37 for nothing will be impossible for God."

38 Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Mary didn't ask the angel to authenticate his message as Zechariah had done in verse 18. Nevertheless, a sign is given to Mary. The fact that Elizabeth is now pregnant in her old age demonstrates that with God nothing is impossible. (IB) Mary's virginity reveals a new depth of meaning, that of complete trust and obedience before God. (JBC)

It is only in the Gospel of Luke that there is any suggestion that John and Jesus were related by blood. Their relationship is not noted anywhere else in the NT. (IB)

Summary:

The doctrine of the Virgin Birth is not articulated as part of the primitive Christian kerygma in Paul's writings or in the early chapters of Acts. There is no hint of it in Mark's gospel or in the common tradition of Matthew. Apart from the first chapter of

Matthew, the only reference to the doctrine in the NT is in this section we have just discussed (verses 26-38). It is very probable that the doctrine of Christ's supernatural birth was already familiar to Luke and he edited his source material to convey that truth. (IB)

The real significance of the Virgin Birth in Christian thought was theological. It declared what had been the faith of the church from its beginning, that God had come into human life for our salvation in Jesus Christ. At the time Luke was writing for the church, the church was already disturbed by schismatic and heretical teachers (Acts 20:28-30). One of the earliest heresies was the denial of Christ's humanity. The Docetists believed that Christ had been a divine being who only seemed to be human. He had not actually taken our flesh upon him, nor had he suffered and died. From the time the Apostle's Creed was formulated, and possibly as early as Luke's day, the doctrine of the Virgin Birth asserted that Christ was truly man as well as truly God. The Son of God had been conceived of a human mother--a virgin in accordance with OT prophecy as the Church read in the LXX text of Isaiah 7:14. In Hebrews 2:17 we read that **he had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people.**

c. VISIT OF MARY TO ELIZABETH ACCOMPLISHED
Luke 1:39-45

15. Read Luke 1:39-45 entirely through one time.

16. Read Luke 1:39-40
(1) None

Luke 1:39-40

39 During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah,
40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

in haste -- The Greek phrase from which this is translated can also mean that Mary went "very thoughtfully" to the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth. (JBC)

[Map of area would be appreciated: Mary=Nazareth; Elizabeth=Ain Karem. Extend comments to discuss the travel time involved, and possibly some geographical details of the area--the way in which Mary traveled from Nazareth to Ain Karem, etc.]

* * * * *

17. Read Luke 1:41a
(1) Luke 1:15

18. Read Luke 1:41b-42
(1) Deuteronomy 28:4 (3) Judith 13:18

- (2) Judges 5:24
- (4) Luke 11:27-28
19. Read Luke 1:43-44
(1) None
20. Read Luke 1:45
(1) Luke 1:20

Luke 1:41-45

- 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit,
42 cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.
43 And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?
44 For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.
45 Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

Verses 41-42:

Elizabeth's unborn child is prophetically aware of the unborn Messiah and his inspiration (verse 15) is transferred to his mother. The future mother of the forerunner recognizes the future mother of the Christ. (IB)

Verses 44-45:

Elizabeth explains to Mary how she recognized her as the mother of the Messiah, and congratulates her on her faith in the angel's words. (IB)

Summary:

There is great power in having faith. What Elizabeth says here is echoed in a larger way throughout the NT.

Faith is our act in that it begins with the turning of our hearts in desire toward God. Then it no longer depends upon any action on our part. It is a quiet surrender of the self to the spirit of God, which then takes hold and brings to fulfillment in us the faith which is his gift and which opens the way for all his continued giving. (IB)

It could not have been any ordinary welcome that would greet Mary when she entered the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Elizabeth must have learned from Zechariah the destiny of their son, and therefore the near advent of the Messiah. She could not, however, have known either when, or of whom, the Messiah would be born. The sign given by her unborn son was not strange to Jewish expectancy, and when he leapt in her womb, she recognized in Mary the mother of her Lord--her salutation was that of a mother to a mother -- the mother of the "preparer" to the mother of Him for whom he would prepare.

The favor that was upon Mary was the favor of all Israel which stretched in a

golden line from the calling of Abraham to the glorious future that now opened. Of the entire narrative, it needs to be said that such an inception of the Messianic appearance, the announcement of it, and the manner of His coming could never have been invented by contemporary Judaism because it ran directly contrary to all its preconceptions.

d. THE CANTICLE OF MARY
Luke 1:46-55

21. Read Luke 1:46-55 entirely through one time.
(1) I Samuel 2:1-10
22. Read Luke 1:46
(1) Psalm 35:9 (2) Isaiah 61:10
23. Read Luke 1:47
(1) Jude 25
24. Read Luke 1:48
(1) I Samuel 1:11 (4) Psalm 113:7
(2) II Samuel 16:12 (5) Luke 11:27
(3) II Kings 14:26

Luke 1:46-48

- 46 And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
47 my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
48 For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all
ages call me blessed.

Verse 46:

and Mary said -- Mary's song of thanksgiving is often called the "Magnificat" (from the first word of the Vulgate [Old Latin] translation). It has been put together from many OT phrases, and expresses deep emotion and strong conviction. Some manuscripts of the VL read "and Elizabeth said" rather than "and Mary said"; the Greek manuscripts, however, attribute the canticle to Mary. (JBC)

Manuscript support for Elizabeth as the speaker is not impressive. For Elizabeth to sing a song of praise for God's goodness to her would be belated in the present context. If Elizabeth has been the speaker, the song should have appeared after verse 25. The Magnificat has its parallel in I Samuel 1:11; I Samuel 2:1-10, and elsewhere in the OT. Luke or his source took a Jewish (or Jewish-Christian) hymn of praise and fitted it to this situation, possibly by the interruption of verse 48. (IB)

Verses 46-47:

In the parallelism of Hebrew poetry, the second clause repeats the first, and there is therefore no distinction between **my soul** and **my spirit**. "Magnifies" means 'declares the greatness of.' (IB)

Verse 48:

This is the only verse in the psalm that relates it specifically to its present context. Luke intends for us to understand the first part of the verse as a reference to the annunciation. (IB)

- | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|-----|-------------------|
| 25. | Read Luke 1:49 | | |
| | (1) Deuteronomy 10:21 | (3) | Psalm 111:9 |
| | (2) Psalm 7:18 | (4) | Psalm 126:2-3 |
| 26. | Read Luke 1:50 | | |
| | (1) Psalm 89:2 | (2) | Psalm 103:13, 17. |
| 27. | Read Luke 1:51 | | |
| | (1) Psalm 89:10 | (3) | Psalm 32:17 (OR) |
| | (2) Psalm 118:15 | | 39:17 (LXX) |
| 28. | Read Luke 1:52 | | |
| | (1) I Samuel 2:7 | (5) | Sirach 10:14 |
| | (2) II Samuel 22:28 | (6) | James 4:6 |
| | (3) Job 5:11 | (7) | I Peter 5:5 |
| | (4) Psalm 147:6 | | |
| 29. | Read Luke 1:53 | | |
| | (1) I Samuel 2:5 | (2) | Psalm 107:9 |
| 30. | Read Luke 1:54 | | |
| | (1) Psalm 96:3 | (2) | Isaiah 41:8-9 |
| 31. | Read Luke 1:55 | | |
| | (1) Genesis 13:15 | (4) | Genesis 22:17-18 |
| | (2) Genesis 17:7 | (5) | Micah 7:20 |
| | (3) Genesis 18:18 | | |

Luke 1:49-55

- 49 The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
50 His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him.
51 He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.
52 He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly.
53 The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty.
54 He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy,
55 according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Verses 48-50:

The first stanza extols the fruits of faith and of lowly dependence on the merciful

God. Luke has already cast Mary in the role of handmaid before God in verse 38. The transition God has achieved in Mary will become so evident that all men will find hope. God exercises his power most of all in caring for the needy. Mary's former loneliness has turned into fruitfulness. (JBC)

These verses express a sense of personal thankfulness to God for his mighty acts, while verses 51-55 praise him for Israel's deliverance from oppressors. (IB)

Verses 51-53:

The second stanza insists upon the great reversals of salvation history -- one must be in need to be saved; one must be blind to be given light by God. God is accustomed to act; he has always done it and will always continue to do it this way.

Verses 54-55:

The conclusion gathers up the idea of the Magnificat in the servant theology of the OT. Jesus applied the theology to himself and the very early church thought of him in these same terms (Acts 3:13). (JBC)

Summary:

God is the subject of verses 51-55. Some have interpreted these verses as anticipations of a redemption that is yet to be accomplished, thus viewing them from the vantage point of the messianic age. This interpretation, however, is forced. It is easier to understand them as extolling God's mighty deeds in days of old. The language is that of the Greek OT (LXX), where parallels to almost every phrase can be discovered. The canticle ends with a rehearsal of God's ancient promise. (IB)

This song of praise concerns Mary, but in a deeper and longer way it concerns Mary's son. The reason for her rejoicing was not in that which she herself might do, but in that which might be done by him who was to be born of her. The earliest church saw the Magnificat as an expression of the kind of salvation God brought about through Jesus. It was a salvation that the great ones of the earth would not welcome. It was to challenge the selfish powers of this earth and exalt those of low degree. (IB)

SESSION 4

Last week we studied the Annunciation of Mary, her visit to Elizabeth, and the Magnificat. This week we continue by studying about the birth of John the Baptist, Mary's return home from her visit, the Benedictus, and a brief disclosure of John's life as he grew into adulthood.

e. BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST REALIZED--ca. 6-5 B.C. Luke 1:57-66

1. Read Luke 1:57-66 entirely through one time.
2. Read Luke 1:57
(1) No references
3. Read Luke 1:58
(1) Luke 1:14
4. Read Luke 1:59
(1) Genesis 17:10 & 12 (3) Luke 2:21
(2) Leviticus 12:3
5. Read Luke 1:60
(1) Luke 1:13
6. Read Luke 1:61-66
(1) No references

Luke 1:57-66

- 57 When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son.
58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her.
59 When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father,
60 but his mother said in reply, "No. He will be called John."
61 But they answered her, "There is no one among your relatives who has this name."
62 So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called.
63 He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name," and all were amazed.
64 Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God.
65 Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea.
66 all who heard these things took them to heart, saying, "What, then, will this child be?" For surely the hand of the Lord was with him.

Verse 58:

[the Lord had shown his great mercy](#) -- In the Bible, God's omnipotence is most clearly revealed in the extent of his mercy. (JBC)

Verse 59:

[to circumcise the child](#) -- Circumcision became the most important act in Israel. It initiated a male child into the covenanted people of God. Its necessity for receiving salvation through Christ was later emphatically denied in Paul's epistles. But in Chapters 1 and 2 of Luke's Gospel, circumcision is made a climactic moment when God and his people are covenanted in the perfect fulfillment of the promises on God's part and the perfect observance of the law on Israel's part. (JBC)

[after his father](#) -- Naming a boy after his father was a very late custom in Israel. (JBC)

The practice of Palestinian Judaism at this time was to name the child at birth. Although naming a male child after the father is not completely unknown, the usual practice was to name the child after the grandfather. The naming of the child John, and Zechariah's recovery from his loss of speech should be understood as fulfilling the angel's announcement to Zechariah in verses 13 and 20. (NAB)

There is OT precedent for allowing neighbors to take part in naming a child (Ruth 4:17). There is none, however, for postponing the ceremony until the 8th day. Luke may have adapted his narrative to Greco-Roman culture. Circumcision was performed according to rabbinical rules by an expert. Jewish children were more frequently named after their grandfather than their father. (IB)

Verses 60-63:

In verse 60, it is possible that Luke thought of Elizabeth as inspired to insist upon John as a name. The narrative implies that Zechariah was deaf as well as dumb which would be an exaggeration of the punishment meted out to him by the angel. (IB)

[a tablet](#) -- In those days a writing tablet was ordinarily a block of wood covered with wax. Zechariah's written confirmation of his wife's unusual choice of a name for their child is accepted by their company as astonishing evidence of the supernatural. (IB)

Verse 64:

Zechariah has served his sentence, and his physical handicap is now lifted. (IB)

Verses 65-66:

Luke often notes that [fear](#) is a response to the manifestation of the supernatural. (IB)

[throughout the hill country of Judea](#) -- This area would have been centered around Hebron. Greatness could be expected of a child born under such remarkable circumstances. (IB)

Summary:

The birth and circumcision of John emphasize John's incorporation into the people of Israel by the sign of the covenant (Genesis 17:1-12). At the beginning of his two-volume work Luke shows those who play crucial roles in the inauguration of Christianity to be wholly a part of the people of Israel. At the end of the Acts of the Apostles he will argue that Christianity is the direct descendant of Pharisaic Judaism.

(NAB)

Here at the circumcision of the child, the [neighbors and friends of the] family group would have named him Zechariah after his father. (IB)

In all Jewish thought and immemorial practice, the giving of a name meant much more than simply attaching a casual label on an infant. In a very intimate and vital way the name given must be appropriate to the person. Special meanings were often attached to names in the OT -- names such as Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. Names were also changed to indicate some new phase in the individual's destiny. For example, Abram was changed to Abraham, Jacob was changed to Israel, Cephas changed to Peter, and Saul changed to Paul. Now a family name was here altered. Zechariah had received from the angel the new and commanding thought that his child should not be named after himself. He should be named John, and the giving of that new name was associated with a promise of the type of man he would grow up to be, and of the great work he would do. (IB)

Overall Summary:

The long awaited event had taken place in the home of Zechariah. It was as if Zechariah had acted as High-Priest, offering his child to God in gratitude and love; and it symbolized this deeper moral truth, that man must by his own act complete what God had instituted. The legend which associates Elijah, as the restorer of the rite of circumcision in the apostate period of the Kings of Israel, was probably in circulation at the time. We can scarcely be mistaken in supposing, as now, that a benediction was spoken before circumcision, and that the ceremony closed with the usual grace over the cup of wine, when the child received his name in a prayer that probably did not much differ from the one still in use today.

Of all this Zechariah was, though deeply interested, yet still a deaf and dumb witness. This only had he noticed, that, in the benediction in which the child's name was inserted, the mother had interrupted the prayer. Without explaining her reason, she insisted that his name should not be that of his aged father, as in the peculiar circumstances might have been expected, but instead his name was to be John. A reference to the father only deepened the general astonishment, when he also gave the same name. But this was not the only cause for marvel. For, immediately the tongue of Zechariah was loosened, and he, who would not utter the name of the child, now burst into praise of the name of the Lord. His last words had been those of unbelief, his first were those of praise.

* * * * *

f. MARY RETURNS HOME FROM HER VISIT
Luke 1:56

7. Read Luke 1:56
- (1) No references

Luke 1:56

56 Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

Personal Comment:

Logically it appears that verse 56 should belong here. Why?

Mary surely didn't just pop in on Zechariah and Elizabeth, and then rush back out of their lives immediately after she had spoken the Magnificat. In fact, verse 56 says that Mary remained with Zechariah and Elizabeth about three months. It simply would not have been in the character of Mary to have stayed three months, and then just prior to delivery left for home. After all she was God's choice to be the mother of his son, therefore her overall personality would almost dictate that she would have remained with Elizabeth, although Luke does not tell us that she did--only that she remained about three months.

Logically, verse 56 should be inserted after the birth and circumcision of John. Luke states **about three months** which is not precise language. He also stated at the Annunciation that Elizabeth was in her sixth month--but he doesn't say whether it was in the earlier part or the latter part of the sixth month, or even if it was in the middle of her sixth month. Since Elizabeth was well up in years, child-bearing for her could not have been an easy task, and Mary probably knew this intuitively. It makes more sense to place verse 56 after the birth and circumcision than prior to those events.

Before we continue with our 3rd reader I would like to comment briefly on the next part of our studies. Like the canticle of Mary, the Magnificat, Zechariah's canticle, the Benedictus, is only loosely connected with its context. Apart from verses 76-77, the hymn in speaking of a horn for our salvation and the daybreak from on high applies more closely to Jesus and his work than they do to John. Again like Mary's canticle, it is largely composed of phrases taken from the Greek OT and may have been a Jewish Christian hymn of praise that Luke adapted to fit the present context by inserting verses 76-77 to give Zechariah's reply to the question asked in verse 66. (NAB)

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g. THE CANTICLE OF ZECHARIAH Luke 1:67-79

8. Read Luke 1:67
(1) No references
9. Read Luke 1:68
 - (1) Psalm 41:13
 - (2) Psalm 72:18
 - (3) Psalm 106:48
 - (4) Psalm 111:9
 - (5) Luke 7:16
10. Read Luke 1:69
(1) No references

11. Read Luke 1:70
(1) Psalm 18:3
12. Read Luke 1:71
(1) Psalm 106:10
13. Read Luke 1:72
(1) Psalm 106:45-46
14. Read Luke 1:73
(1) Genesis 17:6 (3) Psalm 105:8-9
(2) Leviticus 26:42 (4) Micah 7:20
15. Read Luke 1:74
(1) Genesis 22:16-17
16. Read Luke 1:75
(1) Titus 2:12

Luke 1:67-75

- 67 Then Zechariah his father, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied, saying:
- 68 "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited and brought redemption to his people.
- 69 He has raised up a horn for our salvation within the house of David his servant,
- 70 even as he promised through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old;
- 71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us,
- 72 to show mercy to our fathers and to be mindful of his holy covenant
- 73 and of the oath he swore to Abraham our father, and to grant us that,
- 74 rescued from the hand of enemies, without fear we might worship him
- 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Verse 67:

prophesied -- What is meant here is that Luke was recording the effects of the Spirit's activity within the mind and life of one of God's servants. (JBC)

the Holy Spirit is usually the vehicle of prophecy and revelation in Luke-Acts. (IB)

The Benedictus which follows is named from the translation of the first word of the song in the Vulgate. Like the Magnificat it was an early Christian hymn. Verses 67-75 may even have been of Jewish origin. They are largely a chain of OT phrases. Specifically Christian content is introduced in verses 76-79. (IB)

Verse 68:

The hymn blesses Yahweh for what he has achieved of salvation. (JBC)

visited is a common Biblical word, meaning either favor or punishment.

According to the content, God cannot be present in any neutral way. (JBC)

Verse 69:

God is praised for the fulfillment of Jewish messianic hopes. He has raised up a leader from among the descendants of David.

horn is a metaphor in the OT for “power” or “strength.” The Greek gives a literal translation of a typically Semitic expression.

horn of salvation -- is a Semitism, whose meaning can be expressed as “deliverer of victorious power.” (JBC)

Verses 68-69:

At least the first part of the Benedictus is distinctly Jewish, modeled in many ways on prayers said at the circumcision ceremony. Like the Magnificat this hymn of Zechariah resounds with OT allusions. (JBC)

Verse 71:

The salvation from sins is not mentioned until verse 77. The deliverance of the nation from its political enemies is all that is implied in this verse and in verse 74. This deliverance was to be the work of the Messiah according to popular phrasings of the Jewish hope, and the articulation of that hope in verses 68-75 does not betray any Christian reinterpretation. (IB)

Verse 72:

fathers -- is spoken of now as being in the heavenly paradise, and looking forward to the complete fulfillment of all hopes and promises. (JBC)

Verses 72-73:

Freedom from foreign tyranny will be the fulfillment of God’s promised mercy and his holy covenant with Abraham. (IB)

Verse 75:

all our days -- These words reflect a hope in the near fulfillment of the messianic promises through the presence of the redeeming God. (JBC)

Verses 74-75:

Political independence will make it possible for men to serve God without fear and in holiness and righteousness. (IB)

Summary:

In the words of these nine verses the personal joy of Zechariah is lifted up into relationship with a larger patriotism. He is thinking of the gift of his child as part of a far larger and greater gift. What God had given him would be the channel of God’s mercy for a whole people, in which every individual would have a share. (IB)

Zechariah is looking a long way back into the past. The essential worth of life for him and for his child is linked with what had been true ever since the days of Abraham. God had made a covenant with Israel, and it was because of that covenant that this nation had indestructible significance. It was a covenant which the great soul of Abraham had accepted, and the meaning of which the prophets had illuminated and proclaimed. Here the whole interpretation of history is elevated above the common level. Ordinarily a people would estimate the favor of God in immediate and material terms. If they were to believe in a divine redemption, they would want to see it evidenced in the here and now. But to Zechariah’s perception God had already visited and redeemed his people. He had done so because he had planted in their life a spiritual quality and given to them a

spiritual commission which no outward events could destroy. Whatever and whoever might be their enemies, they would escape from them into the citadel of a deep inner security of faith. Whatever might be the events of the moment, this nation could still have the heroic confidence of those to whom it was granted that they could serve God without fear. (IB)

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17. Read Luke 1:76
(1) Isaiah 40:3 (3) Matthew 3:3
(2) Malachi 3:1 (4) Matthew 11:10
18. Read Luke 1:77
(1) No references
19. Read Luke 1:78
(1) Malachi 3:20
20. Read Luke 1:79
(1) Isaiah 60:1-2

Luke 1:76-79

- 76 And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
77 to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,
78 because of the tender mercy of our God by which the daybreak from on high will visit us
79 to shine on those who sit in darkness and death's shadow, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

In these last verses of the prophecy attributed to Zechariah which has become the chant used in churches as the Benedictus, the thought of God's purpose for a people converges into the declaration of what one man, as a representative of that people's soul would do. (IB)

Verses 76-70:

This second stanza sees the hopes of the OT fathers at the dawn of the fulfillment through the intervention of Zechariah's son. (JBC)

Verse 76:

The child will be Elijah, whose coming before the *eschaton* was announced by Malachi 3:1, 23f. God will wondrously intervene among his people. The Christian people saw a new meaning in both Malachi and this canticle, when God intervened to save his people in Jesus. (JBC)

The psalm passes from praise to prediction, and the attention of the reader is

deflected from God's Messiah to the Messiah's forerunner. The title that had been predicted for Jesus was "the Son of the Most High" (verse 32). The Baptist is to be called the prophet of the Most High. The second half of the verse is based on a combination of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. In verse 15 [before the Lord](#) had meant "before God", but Luke understands it to mean "before the Messiah" in this instance. ((IB)

Verse 78:

[the daybreak from on high](#) -- This phrase is used three times in the LXX (Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 3:38; 6:12; and Numbers 24:17). The Greek word used here for daybreak translates the Hebrew word for "scion, branch", which is an OT messianic title. (NAB) The Messiah is hinted at in a mysterious name, "shoot" or "sprout" in the MT, or the "rising" (sun or star) in the LXX. Like the terms "servant" and "son of man", this Messianic title quickly passed out of use in the Christian community. (JBC)

Verses 77-78:

The Baptist's historical role as a preacher of repentance (3:3) is anticipated. He would inform the people whom the Messiah was to redeem of the salvation that consists in the forgiveness of their sins and that is made available to them through the tender mercies of our God. (IB)

Verse 79:

[in darkness and death's shadow](#) -- This phrase is a combination of Isaiah 9:1-2 and 42:7 as found in the LXX. When the darkness of sin and need is blackest, men will understand that God alone is Savior. (JBC)

Verses 78-79:

John will fulfill his mission when the Messianic age -- [the dayspring from on high](#) -- breaks in upon history. Men who have lived previously [in darkness and death's shadow](#) will now learn the [path of peace](#) -- that is, the way of "salvation." (IB)

Overall Summary:

Zechariah's last words had been a question of doubt, his first were a hymn of assurance. Strictly Hebrew in its cast, and closely following OT prophecy, it is remarkable that this hymn of the priest closely follows, and spiritualizes a great part of the most ancient Jewish prayer--the so-called Eighteen Benedictions. It seems to transform the expectancy of that prayer into praise of its realization. If we bear in mind that a great part of these prayers was said by the priests before the lot was cast for incensing, or by the people in the time of incensing, it almost seems as if, during the long period of his enforced solitude, the aged priest had meditated on, and learned to understand, what so often he had previously repeated.

It was all most fitting. The question of unbelief had struck the priest dumb, for most truly unbelief cannot speak. And the answer of faith restored him to speech, for most truly faith does loosen the tongue. The first evidence of his dumbness had been, that his tongue had refused to speak the benediction to the people at the hour of incensing; and the first evidence of his restored power was that he spoke the benediction of God in a rapturous burst of praise and thanksgiving. The sign of the unbelieving priest standing before the awe-struck people, vainly attempting to make himself understood by signs, was most fitting. It was also most fitting that when they made signs to him, the believing father should burst in their hearing into a prophetic hymn.

Far and wide, as these marvelous tidings spread throughout the hill-country of Judea, fear fell on all--the fear also of a nameless hope. The silence of a long-clouded day had been broken, and the light which had suddenly broken through the gloom, laid itself on their hearts in expectancy: "What then shall this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him."

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h. A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE LIFE OF JOHN

21. Read Luke 1:80

(1) Matthew 3:1

(2) Luke 2:40

Luke 1:80

80 The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel.

It is possible that as a young boy John was entrusted to the covenanters at Qumran. (JBC)

For a long time before he appeared at the Jordan River and began to preach, John was in the wilderness -- that is, he deliberately went out into the empty land, away from the towns and from the crowded roads. He separated himself from people in order that he might be alone with God. (IB)

SESSION 5

During this study session we will be looking at the ways in which Matthew and Luke, each in its own way, tells of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus.

Before we ask our 1st Reader to read Matthew 1:18, there are a few brief points I would like to share with you: There are some noteworthy differences between the narratives of Matthew and Luke in their accounts of the birth of Jesus. (1) In Matthew, Joseph is the central and active figure, whereas in Luke, Mary is the central figure. (2) In Luke, Mary is the recipient of revelation, whereas in Matthew Joseph is the recipient with the revelation coming to him through the appearance of an angel in a dream. (3) Matthew mentions no residence in Nazareth prior to the birth whereas Luke does speak of that residency. (4) Both Matthew and Luke agree in the statement of the Virgin Birth and in the childhood residence of Jesus in Nazareth.

Matthew's infancy narrative spells out what is summarily indicated in Matthew 1:16. The virginal conception of Jesus is the work of the Spirit of God. Joseph's decision to divorce Mary is overcome by the heavenly command that he take her into his home and accept the child as his own. The natural genealogical line is broken but the promises to David are fulfilled. It is through Joseph's adoption that the child belongs to the family of David. Matthew sees the virginal conception as the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. (NAB)

i. THE BIRTH OF JESUS AS TOLD BY MATTHEW Matthew 1:18-25

1. Read Matthew 1:18-25 entirely through one time.
2. Read Matthew 1:18
 - (1) No references

Matthew 1:18

18 Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit.

betrothed to Joseph -- betrothal was the first part of marriage, constituting a man and woman as husband and wife. Any subsequent infidelity would have been considered adultery. The betrothal was followed some months later by the husband's taking his wife into his home, at which time normal married life began. (NAB)

betrothed -- some versions use the word "espoused" in place of betrothed. A written contract of marriage had been drawn up between Joseph (or possibly his parents) and the parents of Mary. The Jewish marriage ceremony was accomplished only when the groom took the bride into his house to live -- this is what is meant by the phrase **before they lived together** in this verse, and the words **take** and **took** in verses 20 and 24. In these circumstances premarital unchastity was not considered adultery in the full sense of the word, nor was the repudiation of a marriage contract considered a "divorce" (verse

19) in the full sense of the word. It is very doubtful that the rigorous capital penalty (stoning to death) of the Mosaic Law and the talmudic tradition was enforced in NT times. (JBC) Mary was also legally Joseph's wife if she traveled with him. (IB)

The phrase [with child through the Holy Spirit](#) suggests the all-creating power of God as it did in the OT. The OT knew of many births which took place only through divine intervention (for example: Genesis 18:11-14; Genesis 25:21; and I Samuel 1:4-20), but this story differs in that Jesus had no human father. Matthew's account presupposes the Virgin Birth throughout. (IB)

Pagan mythology had many tales of children born from intercourse between a god and a woman or a goddess and a man--in fact, most mythological "heroes" were thought to have been born this way. Jesus' story is of a very different sort though. We have no more information which would enable us to articulate further on the historical value of Matthew's account. We can however point out three things:

(1) Matthew and Luke alone mention the Virgin Birth. Other writers, such as Mark, John, and Paul teach a high Christology without any reference to it.

(2) Both Matthew and Luke have knowledge of such a story. Each stemmed from separate and independent sources.

(3) The story first appears in Christian circles which were in close touch with Jewish tradition. If it arises out of pious speculation, it is nevertheless based on faith in the unlimited power of the one God, and not on pagan mythology. (IB)

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3. Read Matthew 1:19

(1) No references

Matthew 1:19

19 Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly.

[a righteous man](#) -- as a devout observer of the Mosaic law, Joseph wished to break his union with someone whom he suspected of gross violation of the law. It is commonly said that the law required him to do so, but the texts usually given in support of that view (Deuteronomy 22:20-21) do not clearly pertain to Joseph's situation. (NAB)

[Unwilling to expose her to shame](#) -- the penalty for proven adultery was death by stoning (Deuteronomy 22:21-23). (NAB)

Joseph is called [righteous](#) because of his desire to observe the Law. This righteousness was united with an unwillingness to expose his wife. It did lay within his power to repudiate the agreement by signing a declaration in the presence of witnesses, but without stating the reasons in public. (JBC)

Joseph was one who observed the Jewish Law. According to that law, two courses of action were permissible in such a situation as Joseph was confronted with. He could either expose Mary by bringing her before the court, or he could divorce her privately by handing her a writ in the presence of two witnesses. (IB)

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4. Read Matthew 1:20
(1) Matthew 2:13 and 19 (2) Luke 1:35
5. Read Matthew 1:21
(1) No references

Matthew 1:20-21

- 20 Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.
- 21 She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Verse 20:

Matthew frequently tells of revelation through dreams. (IB)
the angel of the Lord -- is a messenger figure in the OT (for example, Genesis 16:10; Genesis 22:11, 15-16; Exodus 3:2; Judges 6:13; and II Samuel 24:16). It was the angel of the Lord who announced the birth of Samson (Judges 13:3); here he announces the name of the child: Jesus. According to popular etymology the name means “Yahweh is salvation.” This child will be an agent of salvation. The people will be saved from their sins; however, it would not be from external enemies or dangers from nature, as Jewish thought believed. The greatest to bear this name in the OT was the hero of the Book of Joshua. (JBC)

In the OT **the angel of the Lord** was a common designation of God in communication with a human being. (NAB)

In a dream -- See Matthew 2:13, 19, 22. These dreams may be meant to recall the dreams of Joseph, son of Jacob the patriarch (Genesis 37:5-11:19 ?). A closer parallel is the dream of Amram, father of Moses, related by Josephus (Antiquities 2:9, 3; 212:215-216). (NAB)

Verse 21:

The name Joshua or Jesus means “Yahweh is salvation.” (IB)
Jesus -- in first-century Judaism the Hebrew name Joshua meaning “Yahweh helps” was interpreted “Yahweh saves.” (NAB)

His people is the honorific title of Israel. (IB)

From their sins -- In Jewish thought salvation from sin is not an essential part of Messiah’s vocation. On the other hand, one of the characteristics of the days of the Messiah was that sin would disappear. Messiah was to judge and destroy sinners and demons, and God would pour out his Spirit, which brings holiness. (IB)

Looking a little ahead, it might be best to explain Jewish thought on Messiah’s deliverance from sin at this time. The great doctrine of Original Sin, and of the sinfulness of our whole human nature, were not held by the ancient Rabbis. In the absence of a felt need of deliverance from sin, we can understand how rabbinic tradition found no place for the priestly office of the Messiah, and even Jesus’ claims to be the prophet of his

people are almost entirely overshadowed by His appearance as their King and Deliverer. In fact, Israel's national sufferings seemed almost unexplainable to them; yet they contrasted so sharply with the glory the Rabbis expected as due them because they were God's chosen people. (LToJC)

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6. Read Matthew 1:22
(1) No references
7. Read Matthew 1:23
(1) Isaiah 7:14 (LXX)

Matthew 1:22-23

- 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:
- 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him 'Emmanuel,' which means 'God is with us.'"

Verse 22:

Matthew presents the event as the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. The formula of "fulfillment" as it occurs here appears 11 times in Matthew. This is more often than in the other 3 Gospels combined. The term does not signify mere prediction and fulfillment; and it is difficult to state in modern terms the kind of thinking involved. The saving event of the Gospel gives the word of the OT, which is a declaration of the power and will of God to save, a new dimension of reality. The text of Isaiah is quoted according to the LXX, except for the reading "they shall name" (the LXX says "you shall name"; the MT says "you shall name"). (JBC)

Similar formulas such as we find here in Matthew are also found in rabbinical writings. (IB)

Verse 23:

[virgin](#) -- The LXX used a Greek word meaning "virgin" to translate the Hebrew word in Isaiah 7:14 meaning "young girl." This gives the text of Isaiah a new dimension of reality, and Matthew uses it to affirm the virgin birth. His emphasis, however, seems to be more on the declaration of a savior who shall be called "Emmanuel," meaning "God is with us" than on the word "virgin." The birth initiates the Messianic age of salvation to which the OT looks forward. The age begins with the birth of a child, and this is the force of the allusion to Isaiah. Jesus realizes the presence of God among his people in an entirely new way. (JBC) [If we compare the birth of Jesus with the thought of the "Shekinah" in Jewish thought, it would appear that the "Shekinah" is now present in living color, and is alive and present in the world rather than being in the appearance of a cloud hovering above the tabernacle in the wilderness. MINE]

The Greek word "virgin" which is taken from the LXX version of Isaiah 7:14 is a translation of the Hebrew word for "young woman." Even if ideas of a miraculous birth originally lay behind the thought of Isaiah 7:14, they had already been forgotten by the

first century. Matthew, however, seized upon this text as further confirmation of his story. It was especially appropriate because of the name **Emmanuel**, which he correctly translated **God is with us**. Isaiah's thought was: "The deliverance will be so striking that a mother will give her child this name." (IB)

God is with us -- God's promise of deliverance to Judah in Isaiah's time is seen by Matthew as fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, in whom God is with his people. The name Emmanuel is alluded to at the end of the gospel where Jesus assures his disciples of his continued presence, "... I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). (NAB)

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8. Read Matthew 1:24
(1) No references

9. Read Matthew 1:25
(1) Luke 2:7

Matthew 1:24-25

- 24 When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.
25 He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.

Verse 25:

until she bore a son -- The evangelist is concerned to emphasize that Joseph was not responsible for the conception of Jesus. The Greek word "until" does not imply normal marital conduct after Jesus' birth, nor does it exclude it. (NAB)

This verse with the phrase **until she bore a son** has caused trouble since the early heresies which concluded from it that Mary and Joseph had marital relations after the birth of Jesus. The implication is easily taken in the English translation of the Greek text; however, the implication is not present in the Greek text, and still less if we suppose a Semitic background of the passage. [Semitic expressions are often difficult, if not impossible, to define precisely in the English language. MINE] The NT knows nothing of any children of Mary and Joseph; [it only talks about Jesus' brothers and sisters which can easily be explained. MINE] Matthew's interest here is in the affirmation that Joseph is not the natural father of Jesus, and his language is determined by this interest. The agent of the conception is "a holy Spirit" (verse 20). The term "a holy Spirit" is used in the OT to designate God's mysterious power; it is not used to designate the agent of human conception. (JBC)

According to Protestant scholars, the phrase does not support the theory of Mary's perpetual virginity. These scholars continue by stating that marital relations between Mary and Joseph is presupposed in Matthew 13:55-56 and Mark 6:3 that Jesus had brothers and sisters. Nevertheless, they admit that two ancient manuscripts read only: "And she bore a son." (IB)

[The problem of Jesus' brothers and sisters is easily resolved when we consider

that the Gospels do not give every details of every event in the life of Jesus and those that were close to him. If we look ahead into the life of Jesus, we will discover that as a child of twelve Jesus went with Mary and Joseph to the Temple in Jerusalem. When they returned to Nazareth, Joseph is never again spoken of in the Gospels. The assumption must be that he was no longer living, although the Gospels do not speak of his death. Since he was important to the life of Jesus, why isn't he mentioned after the Holy Family returned from Jerusalem? Unless he did die during the years when Jesus was growing up in Nazareth. Taking these thoughts into account, it is very possible (1) that Joseph had been a great deal older than Mary, (2) that he had previously been married, (3) that his former wife had died, and (4) that he was left with their children to raise. When he and Mary married, she would then assume the responsibilities of motherhood to his children. Furthermore, Jesus would naturally assume the role of brother to Joseph's children. None of this is stated in the Gospels, but it is a means by which it is equally as possible as any of the other assumptions made concerning Jesus' brothers and sisters. One thing is very clear -- it does not of necessity mean that these "brothers (and sisters)" were children of Mary and Joseph. Furthermore, there is no mention in the NT of any children Mary might have had other than Jesus. MINE]

Overall Summary:

Let's now attempt to bring everything we've studied in this section into a summary of sorts. Mary had just returned from her three month's visit with Zechariah and Elizabeth. Her return to Nazareth, plus the newly born infant she had left behind, would probably have been foremost in her mind along with the thought of how in the world was she to going to explain all this to Joseph. There surely must have been intense pain in her soul when she informed him of her condition. However deep his trust in the woman he had chosen for a wife, it would still have left consuming questioning within his own heart of what had actually taken place to create Mary's now pregnant condition. After all she had been away from her home for three months, and anything could have taken place during that time. Only a divine communication would dispel the questioning from his heart. It was also needed to give him total assurance of the truth of the matter.

We can intuitively sense in the "thoughts" of Joseph the anxious contending of feelings he must have endured. Neither wanting to disobey the Mosaic law nor wanting to cause Mary shame, an easy solution to his conflict was not easily resolved. He had chosen the best of all outcomes when he decided to divorce her privately. The humble carpenter from Nazareth would not willingly make a public exhibition of Mary.

The assurance of the truth of Mary's words was miraculously conveyed to him in dream-vision. Now all would be made clear. Even in the terms in which he was addressed by the angel of the Lord (Son of David) were utterly unusual in ordinary circumstances. The naming of the unborn Messiah was in accord with popular notions; the symbolism of such a name was deeply rooted in Jewish belief. Yet while the explanation of Jesus as He who would save the His people from their sins described at least one generally expected aspect of the Messiah's mission, Joseph may not have known that it was the basis of all the rest.

The fact that such an announcement came to him in a dream would dispose Joseph all the more readily to receive it. A good dream was one of the three things

popularly regarded as marks of God's favor. So general was this belief in their significance that it has passed into a popular saying: "If anyone sleeps seven days without dreaming (or rather, without remembering his dream for interpretation), call him wicked" (meaning, as being unremembered by God).

Divinely set at rest, Joseph could no longer hesitate. The highest duty towards the Virgin Mother and the unborn Jesus demanded an immediate marriage, which would afford not only outward, but moral protection to both.

Every little incident in these happenings was in fulfillment of what had already been prefigured. The promise of a Virgin-born son as a sign of the firmness of God's covenant of old with David and his house; the now unfolded meaning of the former symbolic name Emmanuel -- all this could now be clearly read in the light of the breaking day. Never, not even when God gave to the doubts of Moses (Exodus 30:12) this as the sign of Israel's future deliverance that in that mountain they should worship, had unbelief been answered by more strange evidence. Nevertheless, the stability of the Davidic house was ensured by the future advent of Emmanuel. It had all occurred as it was intended. The golden cup of prophecy which Isaiah had placed empty on the Holy Table, waiting for the time of the end, was now filled to the brim, with the new wine of the Kingdom. (LToJC)

The name Jesus was a fairly common name in Israel, and it does have a winning sound to it, but it means "The Lord is salvation." You and I can, and should, forgive injury that has been done to us; but we cannot forgive sins, for sins are ultimately not against ourselves or our neighbors but against God. (IB)

Too little attention has been given to Joseph's part in the gospel story. We know that he was righteous which implies both religious scruple as well as obedience to the will of God. He was sensitive to divine visitation, and quick to heed the call of the moment. This causes us to assume that he was devoted to Mary and the children of his household. It is also fair to assume that Joseph was the human channel through which Jesus drew some of his incomparable wisdom. (IB)

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j. THE BIRTH OF JESUS AS TOLD BY LUKE

Luke 2:1-7

10. Read Luke 2:1-7 entirely through one time.

11. Read Luke 2:1-2
(1) No references

Luke 2:1-2

- 1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled.
- 2 The first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

There is historical evidence that universal registrations of Roman citizens occurred in the

years 28 B.C., 8 B.C., and 14 A.D. There is further evidence of enrollments in individual provinces of those who are not Roman citizens. Such a universal census of the Roman world under Caesar Augustus is, however, unknown outside the NT. Furthermore, there are notorious historical problems connected with Luke's dating the census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Various attempts to resolve the difficulties have proved to be unsuccessful. (NAB)

P. Sulpicius Quirinius became legate of the province of Syria in 6-7 A.D. when Judea was annexed to the province of Syria. At that time, a provincial census of Judea was taken up. If Quirinius had been legate of Syria previously, it would have to have been before 10 B.C. because the various legates of Syria from 10 B.C. to 4 B.C. (the year in which Herod died) are known, and such a dating for an earlier census under Quirinius would create additional problems for dating the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Luke 3:1, 23). Even a previous legateship after 4 B.C. (and before 6 A.D.) would not fit with the dating of Jesus' birth in the days of Herod (Luke 1:5; Matthew 2:1). (NAB)

Luke may simply be combining Jesus' birth in Bethlehem with his vague recollection of a census under Quirinius (see also Acts 5:37) to underline the significance of this birth for the whole Roman world. The significance being that through this child born in Bethlehem peace and salvation came to the empire. (NAB)

Caesar Augustus -- The reign of the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus is usually dated from 27 B.C. until his death in 14 A.D. According to Greek inscriptions, Augustus was regarded in the Roman Empire as a "savior" and a "god," and he was credited with establishing a time of peace throughout the Roman world during his long reign. It is not by chance that Luke relates the birth of Jesus to the time of Caesar Augustus--the real savior and peace-bearer is the child born in Bethlehem. The great emperor is simply God's agent who provides the occasion for God's purposes to be accomplished. (NAB)

The whole world -- would mean the whole Roman world; that is, Rome, Italy, and the Roman provinces. (NAB)

Verses 1 and 2 are distinctly different in style from the Semitic tone of the rest of chapters 1 and 2 and are Luke's own thoughts, making his own contributions to the Infancy Narrative. (JBC)

when Quirinius was governor of Syria -- Luke's reference to the census of Quirinius poses an historical problem that is still unsolved. It rises chiefly from Acts 5:37 and Josephus (Antiquities Book 1, Chapter 13: 5) which refer to a census under Quirinius while Coponius was procurator of Judea. This would have been somewhere around 6-7 A.D. (JBC)

The implication of Luke 1:26 is that Jesus was born six months after the birth of John the Baptist. Therefore **in those days** cannot have reference to the time of John's "manifestation to Israel" (1:80b). Luke seeks to set his story against the background of secular history (3:1-2). **Caesar Augustus** ruled from 27 B.C. to 14 A.D. No other source makes any mention of a census of **all the world** (a hyperbole [an exaggeration] for the Roman Empire) during his reign. An enrollment in the province of Syria for purposes of taxation was undertaken in 6 A.D., or 7 A.D. when **Quirinius was governor**. The references to it by Josephus (Jewish War Book II, Chapter 8:1 and Book VII, Chapter 8:1) imply that this census was the **first enrollment**, for it raised a storm of protest among the Jews and led to an insurrection in Galilee that was suppressed only with some difficulty

(Acts 5:37). Since [Quirinius](#) was never Roman legate in Syria during the lifetime of Herod the Great, and Luke's earlier narratives assume that John the Baptist -- and therefore Jesus also -- was born while Herod was still king of Judea (1:5), it would appear that the evangelist has been guilty of an anachronism. Many ingenious attempts have been made to escape this conclusion, but all fall short of demonstration. Furthermore it is improbable that any Roman census would have required a man to report to the home of his ancestors. Such a procedure would have been almost as impractical in Roman times as it would be in our own, and the Roman state was interested in a man's property, not in his pedigree. (IB)

To Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah, not only OT prediction, but the testimony of Rabbinic teachers, unhesitatingly pointed. Yet nothing could be imagined more directly contrary to Jewish thoughts and feelings--and therefore nothing less likely to suggest itself as a Jewish invention -- than the circumstances which, according to the Gospel narrative, brought about the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem. A counting of the people, or Census; and that Census taken at the bidding of a heathen Emperor, and executed by one so universally hated as Herod, would represent all that was repugnant to Jewish feeling. If the account of the circumstances, which brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, has no basis in fact, but is a legend invented to locate the birth of the Messiah in the royal city of David, it was clumsily devised. There is absolutely nothing to account for its origination--either from parallel events in the past, or from contemporary expectancy. Why would they connect the birth of their Messiah with what was most repugnant to Israel, especially if, as the advocates of a legendary hypothesis contend, it did not occur at a time when any Jewish Census was taken, but ten years previously? (LToJC)

If it is impossible to rationally account for any legendary origin of the narrative of Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem; the historical grounds, on which its accuracy has been suggested as untrustworthy, are equally insufficient. They resolve themselves into this: that (beyond the Gospel-narrative) we have no solid evidence that Quirinius (Cyrenius) was at that time occupying the needful official position in the East to order such a registration for Herod to carry out. But even this feeble contention is by means historically unquestionable. At any rate, there are two facts which render any historical mistake by Luke on this point extremely difficult to believe. (1) He was evidently aware of a Census under Quirinius (Cyrenius), some years later (See Acts 5:37). And (2) whatever interpretation of 2:2 may be adopted, it will at least be admitted, that the interrelated sentence about Quirinius (Cyrenius) was not necessary for the narrative, and that the writer must have intended thereby emphatically to mark a certain event. An author would not be likely to call special attention to a fact, of which he had only indistinct knowledge; rather, if it must be mentioned, he would do so in the most indefinite terms. This presumption in favor of Luke's statement is strengthened by the consideration, that such an event as the taxing of Judea must have been so easily ascertainable by him. (LToJC)

Yet we are not left to the presumptive reasoning just set forth. That Caesar Augustus made registers of the Roman Empire, and of subject and tributary states, is now generally admitted. This registration--for the purpose of future taxation--would also embrace Palestine. Even if no actual order to that effect had been issued during the

lifetime of Herod, we can understand that he would deem it most expedient to take steps for making a registration, and that registration would be according to Jewish custom rather than Roman manner -- (1) First, on account of his relations to the Emperor, and (2) second, in view of the probable excitement which a heathen Census would cause in Palestine. Therefore, this Census arranged by Augustus, and taken by Herod in his own manner was, according to Luke, "first (really) carried out when Quirinius (Cyrenius) was Governor of Syria, some years after Herod's death and when Judea had become a Roman province. (LToJC)

We are now prepared to follow the course of the Gospel narrative. In consequence of the decree of Caesar Augustus, Herod directed a general registration to be made following the Jewish, rather than the Roman, manner. According to the Roman law, all country-people were to be registered in their "own city"--thereby meaning the town to which the village or place, where they were born, was attached. In so doing, the "house and lineage" of each were marked. According to the Jewish mode of registration, the people would have been enrolled according to tribes, families, or clans, and the house of their fathers. But as the ten tribes had not returned to Palestine from the exile, this could only take place to a very limited extent, while it would be easy for each to be registered in "his own city." In the case of Joseph and Mary, whose descent from David was not only known, but where, for the sake of the unborn Messiah, it was most important that this should be distinctly noted, it was natural that, in accordance with Jewish law, they should have gone to Bethlehem. Perhaps Joseph and Mary might even have been glad to leave Nazareth, and seek, if possible, a home in Bethlehem. So strong might this feeling have been, that it afterwards required special Divine direction to induce Joseph to relinquish this chosen place of Bethlehem, and return to Galilee. In these circumstances, Mary, now the "wife" of Joseph, though standing to him only in the actual relationship of "betrothed," would, of course, accompany her husband to Bethlehem. There is no need to discuss whether Roman or Jewish census-usage would have required her presence, because it did not. (LToJC)

Summary:

(IB) A decree went out from Caesar Augustus. In the year to which those words refer the most powerful person on earth was Caesar Augustus, emperor of Rome. Born in 63 B.C. and named Gaius Octavius, he was the great nephew of Julius Caesar, who had led the Roman legions across the Rubicon and carried them to conquests wider than had been won before. Adopted by Julius Caesar as his son and heir, he stood in obvious danger after Caesar's assassination. But steadily he won his way to power against Mark Antony and other rivals, and at last he was seated on the imperial throne and given by the Roman senate the title of Augustus.

The Roman dominion extended all over the Mediterranean world, and reached across to the island of Britain, and went eastward into Asia. Wherever the Roman legions marched, men made way before them. Augustus himself was responsible for notable achievements. Concerning Rome itself, it was said of him that he found it brick and left it marble. So it was that under the rule of Augustus the very name of Rome meant wealth, power, and authority.

Then, is a small corner of a conquered province which was part of the Roman

Empire, one night a baby was born. It was in a little town to which the mother and her husband had come because the decree of Caesar Augustus had compelled them to make the journey there. Both of them were poor, and when they came to the town, no one took notice of their coming, and no one helped them to find a place in which to stay. Since the only shelter they could get was a stable, it was in a stable that the baby was born, a baby whose name was Jesus.

The rest of the town was not concerned. And certainly no flicker of awareness or interest stirred in the general world outside. In far-off Rome, Caesar Augustus could not have known about it, or listened if by any chance he had been told. Who cared what had happened in insignificant Palestine? And particularly who cared for any event so common as that a woman had born a child? Birth was as common as the day. What did it matter that one life more or less should be added to the shifting panorama of the earth?

As between Caesar Augustus and the child born in Palestine, who would have had any question as to which was the significant figure? Surely Caesar Augustus would tower above the horizons of history, while a child born in one of his provinces would be lost among the multitudes that existed beneath his shadow. But it has not been so. Great as he was, Caesar Augustus is now only an echo of ancient times, while the name of the child he had never heard of is spoken by millions with reverence and love in prayers that go up from single hearts and in the worship of numberless churches and great cathedrals. Although Augustus represented the imperial power that men tried to deify in his person, that power did go down to death. Meanwhile, the one born in Palestine was to proclaim a kingdom mightier than the Roman, and to tell of a world saved not by Man who became God, but by God who became Man.

Something mightier than a proclamation by an emperor had happened. A decree went out from Caesar Augustus -- that was one fact. But here was the more tremendous fact -- God sent forth his Son (Galatians 4:4). The whole meaning of Christian history is summed up in that contrast. Life and the spirit's inner life are more powerful than things. It appeared that Caesar Augustus had all the resources of power in his hands; but his power has gone and the ancient Rome over which he ruled was doomed to fall to catastrophe and ruin. Meanwhile the power of Jesus has lived and gone on increasing, because it is the power of light and love which can reach into men's hearts and make them different and new.

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12. Read Luke 2:3

(1) No references

13. Read Luke 2:4

(1) Micah 5:2

(2) Matthew 2:6

14. Read Luke 2:5

(1) Matthew 1:18

(2) Luke 2:7

Luke 2:3-5

- 3 So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town.
4 And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David,
5 to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

Verse 3:

each to his own town -- A Roman census could be based on residence in one's native city. An Egyptian papyrus contains an edict of the governor of Egypt in 107 A.D. ordering a "census by household" and stipulating that all who are out of their districts are to return to their own home. (JBC)

The suggestion that Joseph had to journey to Bethlehem because he owned property in that city has no warrant in Luke's story. In any case Mary would not have been obliged to accompany him. (IB)

Verse 4:

to the city of David -- Emphasis is put here on the royal privileges that come to Jesus through Joseph (1:32-33). **Bethlehem** -- The distance between Nazareth and Bethlehem would be about 90 miles. (JBC)

Verse 5:

his betrothed -- has the support of the best Greek manuscripts, but "his wife" is a reading found in the O.L. manuscripts and in the Sinaitic Syriac. Its displacement may have been due to the harmonization of verse 5 with 1:27. "His espoused wife" is a meaningless combination of both readings that occur in later manuscripts. (IB)

The meaning of the name "Bethlehem" is "the house of bread." Thought and imagination might linger upon the significance of that word. Doubtless the origin of the name was due to the simple fact that Bethlehem is in the middle of a relatively fertile region. That is a rare thing in Palestine, which in part is a barren land. Around it are great regions which are still more barren. Below it is the long, grim wilderness of Sinai. To the East, beyond the region of the Jordan valley, rise the harsh ramparts of Moab. Beyond these are the empty spaces of desert which are inhabited only by the Arab Bedouins and which stretch away toward the deep heart of Asia. Even to the West of the Jordan Valley there is the gaunt and lonely Tekoa, from which came the prophet Amos. But around Bethlehem the land was of a gentler kind. It was there that the wheat ripened in the fields and the figs and olives grew. In Bethlehem and its neighborhood people might live with a reasonable security of subsistence. (IB)

Surely it is not irrelevant that the birth of Jesus was thus associated with the town whose name means "the house of bread." The love of God, of which his birth was the supreme expression, is not indifferent to simple and basic human needs. Jesus himself was no aloof ascetic. One of the first petitions in the prayer he taught his disciples is "Give us this day our daily bread." He liked those familiar and friendly contacts with people which are most instinctively made when people sit down to eat their food together. In the Gospels, there is the mention of Jesus going to this or that house to dine--to Simon Peter's house in Capernaum, to the wedding feast in Cana, to Matthew the publican's, to the house of Zacchaeus, to Mary and Martha's house at Bethany, to the house of Simon

the Pharisee, to the upper room where Jesus ate with the disciples at the Last Supper, and even after his resurrection, to the house of the two disciples at Emmaus, where he was known in the breaking of bread. He was never indifferent either to human need or to human happiness. His life had a balance and roundedness such as few of the world's great creators of religions have ever approached. He moved in two worlds at once, and yet without ever seeming to be less but rather more a participant in this one. He had about him the power of an endless life, and yet he gave himself so intimately and so completely to the homely human contacts that the simplest matters of everyday existence was made beautiful. When he wanted to illustrate the meaning of the kingdom of God, he spoke of the sower scattering the grain that would ripen into the harvest, or of the woman kneading leaven into the meal, of a man at the end of a journey knocking at his friend's house for bread. As he looked at men's efforts to gain their livelihood, he said, "Your heavenly father knows that you have need of all these things" (Matthew 6:32). He did not want them to be anxious or to struggle as those who think that everything depends on their own anxiousness and tension. But he himself had lived and worked in Nazareth, and he knew the practical necessities on which life rests. The love of God understands these things, he said, and God cares. And if his children are obedient to his purpose, he will provide. (IB)

Bethlehem is a house of bread not only in the physical sense. It suggests the house of the living bread which feeds all that is fullest in mankind's souls. (IB)

Jesus saw always that double aspect of life: "Man shall not live by bread alone," he said, "but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). He knew then, and he would know now, that no satisfaction of their economic wants, vital, urgent, and primary though these are, can ultimately feed the best in our human life. (IB)

Summary:

The short winter's day was probably closing in as the two travelers from Nazareth, bringing with them the few necessities of a poor Eastern household, neared their journey's end. The ninety mile journey was most probably arranged to consist of several days spent in traveling, making its progress in as slow and easy stages as was possible. Their arrival at nightfall would have meant that the inn was already filled up which would not have been the case if they had reached Bethlehem earlier in the daytime hours. Their way had been long and weary -- at the very least it would have required a three-day's journey regardless of the route they had taken from Nazareth. Yet they would have probably followed the common pathway in a desire to avoid Samaria which would have taken them along the eastern banks of the Jordan, and by the fords of Jericho. Although passing through one of the warmest parts of the country, the season of the year, even in the most favorable circumstances, must have greatly increased the difficulties of their journey. A sense of rest and peace must, almost unconsciously, have crept over the travelers when at last they reached the rich fields that surrounded the ancient "House of Bread". Winter though it was, the green and silvery foliage of the olive might, even at that season, mingle with the pale pink of the almond (earth's early waker) and with the darker coloring of the opening peach buds. The chaste beauty and sweet quiet of the place would recall memories of Boaz, of Jesse, and of David. As the travelers reached the heights of Bethlehem, and probably long before, the most prominent object in view

must have been the great castle which Herod had built, and called after his own name. Perched on the highest hill south-east of Bethlehem, it was a magnificent palace, a strong fortress, and almost a courtier city. With a sense of relief the travelers would have turned their sight away from this, to mark the undulating outlines of the mountain-ridges of Tekon. Through the break of the hills eastward the heavy molten surface of the Dead Sea would appear in view; westward wound the road to Hebron. And behind them lay the valleys and hills which separated Bethlehem from Jerusalem, and concealed the Holy City. (LToJC)

At present such thoughts would have given way to the pressing necessity of finding shelter and rest. The little town of Bethlehem was crowded with those who had come from all the outlying district to register their names. Even if the strangers from far-off Galilee had been personally acquainted with any one in Bethlehem, who could have shown them hospitality, they would have found every house fully occupied. The inn was filled to capacity, and the only available space was where the cattle ordinarily stabled. Bearing in mind the simple habits of the East, this scarcely implies what it would in the Western world. Perhaps the seclusion and privacy from the noisy, chattering crowd, which thronged the inn, would be all the more welcome. (LToJC)

Early in the history of Jesus' life we are reminded of the absence of details provided by the Gospel writers. However, we must remember that they were not written to provide us with a biography of Jesus. (LToJC)

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15. Read Luke 2:6
(1) No references

16. Read Luke 2:7
(1) Matthew 1:25

Luke 2:6-7

6 While they were there, the time came for her to have her child,
7 and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

first-born son -- The Greek word used here is consistently used throughout the OT (LXX) for the child who will continue the name and receive the double portion of the ancestral line (Genesis 27; Deuteronomy 21:17). In certain cases the name carried strong messianic significance; through the first-born the patriarchal blessings or religious heritage of Israel were transmitted (Genesis 27; Exodus 4:22; Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:18). The strong Jewish character of the Infancy Narrative, therefore, explains the use of this Greek word in place of the one that would have used to mean "only-begotten" of 7:12. The former word in no way demands that Mary had other children by Joseph. (JBC)

The description of Jesus as firstborn son does not necessarily mean that Mary had other sons. It is a legal description indicating that Jesus possessed the rights and

privileges of the firstborn son (Genesis 27; Exodus 13:2; Numbers 3:12-13; Numbers 18:15-16; Deuteronomy 21:15-17. (NAB)

wrapped him in -- In the long strips of cloth, customary in Palestine, so that the child would grow straight and strong. (JBC)

“Wrapped him in swaddling clothes” may be an allusion here to the birth of another descendant of David, his son Solomon, who though a great king was also wrapped in swaddling clothes like any other infant (Wisdom 7:4-6). (NAB)

manger -- A feeding trough for animals. Jesus was born in one of the caves in the hills around Bethlehem. These caves were used at times as homes for families by adding a lean-to at the entrance to the cave; the family’s livestock was housed inside the cave. (JBC)

There might be a possible allusion to Isaiah 1:3 in the LXX version in the phrase “laid him in a manger.” (NAB)

in the inn -- The original Greek word for this phrase means a room for a guest or for eating (Luke 22:11). Because the outer room attached to the cave was already fully occupied or at least did not afford privacy, Joseph brought Mary inside the cave where the livestock ordinarily rested. (JBC)

With the simplicity that is often the mark of his literary genius, Luke tells the story of Jesus’ humble birth in a single sentence (in the Greek text). **Her first-born son** -- Luke refers in 8:19 to Jesus’ brothers. [Nowhere is it indicated that these brothers were Mary’s own children. MINE] Mark gives the names of four, and mentions at least two sisters (Mark 6:3). An alternative translation to **manger** would be “stall”, and to **inn** would be “guest room” (22:11). The ox and the ass were introduced into apocryphal versions of the story from Isaiah 1:3. The later tradition that Jesus was born in a cave is first mentioned by Justin (ca. 150 A.D.). In the early fourth century the Basilica of Constantine was built behind its traditional site. (IB)

There was no place for them in the inn. There are no words in the entire Gospel of Luke upon which the minds of Christians have dwelt more meditatively and more tenderly than upon these. Out of what is stated here the scene shapes itself again as vividly to the imagination as though it were beheld by the actual eyes: a little town in darkness, a jostling crowd of people arriving and pressing ahead of one another for harborage, Joseph and Mary of Nazareth coming wearily to the end of their long journey with no room for them in the rude village inn, and nothing to do then but to find a corner in a stable where Mary could come to rest. (IB)

Of course the picture as Luke presents it cannot be pressed too far, as though we could identify persons and their motives in a Bethlehem that was. But one reason why it lays such a hold upon the mind and heart is that the crowded inn of the story becomes also an eternal parable of the human soul. Why was there no room in the inn for the Christ child who is at its doors? (IB)

Other guests had arrived there first. In the imagined scene at Bethlehem, if Mary and Joseph had come earlier to the inn, they doubtless would have been received. If they were turned away, it was not that there was any ill will against them, but simply because the inn-keeper was so harried with other people that he had no patience to look at any more. His house was a place where those in caravans rested, and those who had arrived there first had already filled it up. These travelers from Nazareth had come late, the inn

was crowded, they could not get in, and that was all there was to that. (IB)

Another reason why there was no room for them in the inn might have been because their arrival was unexpected. No one knew they were coming, and no one recognized their importance when they did come. If the one who had been in charge of the inn had dreamed who Mary's child would be, he would have found means to welcome him. In fact, he would have been flattered at the idea of welcoming greatness. He might even have rearranged his guests and sent some of them to find lodgings elsewhere. But he didn't know these things. (IB)

Summary:

As to all that passed in the seclusion of that "stable" -- the circumstances of the Nativity, even its exact time after the arrival of Mary is not mentioned in the narrative. Beyond the announcement of the bare facts -- that the Virgin mother brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger -- Holy Scripture, with indescribable appropriateness and delicacy, draws a veil over that most sacred history. Two impressions only are left on the mind: (1) that of utmost earthly humility, in the surrounding circumstances, and (2) that of inward fitness, in the contrast suggested by them. Instinctively and reverently, it seems well that it should have been so. (LToJC)

On the other hand, the circumstances just noted afford the strongest indirect evidence of the truth of this narrative. If it were the outcome of Jewish imagination, where is the basis for it in contemporary expectation? Would Jewish legend have ever presented its Messiah as born in a stable, to which chance circumstances had consigned His Mother? The whole contemporary Jewish opinion would have run in the opposite direction. Furthermore, it may be safely said that no apocryphal or legendary narrative of such a (legendary) event would have been characterized by such scantiness, or rather absence, of details. The two essential features of legend and of tradition are that they always seek to surround their heroes with a halo of glory, and they attempt to supply details which are otherwise wanting. In both these respects a more sharply marked contrast could scarcely be presented than in the Gospel narrative. (LToJC).

SESSION 6

We've seen how Matthew and Luke have thus far presented the Infancy Narrative. Now we will continue with the few details each tells us about the very early years of Jesus' life.

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k. THE VISIT OF THE SHEPHERDS Luke 2:8-20

1. Read Luke 2:8-20 entirely through one time.
2. Read Luke 2:8
(1) No references

Luke 2:8

8 Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock.

It was in these same [fields](#), or pastures, that David had fought the lion and bear to protect the sheep (I Samuel 17:34-35). The flock that is mentioned here may have been meant for the temple sacrifices in Jerusalem. (Internet--Crosswalks site)

As typical in Luke, it is the poor, the [shepherds](#), who are first to receive the message of salvation in Jesus' presence among men. A double tradition or reputation surrounds the shepherd. The patriarchs were shepherds, as was David, and "to shepherd" was a synonym for ruling (II Samuel 7:7; Jeremiah 2:8). God himself is called the shepherd of Israel (Psalms 23:1; Psalm 80:2). In both pagan and patristic literature shepherds are the innocent ones to whom divinity reveals itself; but this idea seems to be outside the scope of biblical thought. Another Israelite tradition, however, held that the shepherds were so destitute as to always be on the point of stealing and therefore completely untrustworthy. (JBC)

Early in the 3rd century A.D. some parts of the church celebrated January 6 as the birthday of Jesus. In the 4th century that date was displaced by December 25 -- a day that had long been the occasion of a pagan festival associated with the rebirth of various solar deities. It was the date of the winter solstice according to the Julian calendar. Both Matthew and Luke imply that the birth of Jesus took place at night. Luke often insists that revelation comes to humble people (Luke 1:53; Luke 6:20; Luke 7:22). (IB)

Summary:

(LToJC) As we pass from the sacred gloom of the cave out into the night, its sky is all aglow with starry brightness. There is nothing now to conceal, but much to reveal, though the manner of it would seem strangely incongruous to Jewish thinking. Yet Jewish tradition may here prove both illustrative and helpful. That the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, was a settled conviction. Equally so was the belief, that He was to be revealed from "the tower of the flock." This tower was not the watchtower for ordinary

flocks which pastured on the barren sheep ground beyond Bethlehem, rather it lay close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem. A passage in the Mishna leads to the conclusion that the flocks, which pastured there, were destined for the Temple sacrifices, and that the shepherds, who watched over them, were not ordinary shepherds. These shepherds were under the ban of Rabbinism, on account of the necessary isolation from religious ordinances, and their manner of life, which rendered strict legal observance unlikely, if not absolutely impossible. The same Mishnic passage also leads us to infer, that these flocks lay out all the year round. Therefore, Jewish tradition in some dim manner apprehended the first revelation of the Messiah from that tower, where shepherds watched the Temple-flocks all the year round. This speaks of a deep symbolic significance of such a coincidence.

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3. Read Luke 2:9
(1) Luke 1:11 and 26
4. Read Luke 2:10
(1) No references
5. Read Luke 2:11

(1) Matthew 1:21	(4) Acts 2:36
(2) Matthew 16:16	(5) Acts 5:31
(3) John 4:42	(6) Philippians 2:11

Luke 2:9-12

- 9 The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear.
- 10 The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.
- 11 For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord.
- 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

Messiah -- The title *christos*, "Christ," is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *masiah*, "Messiah," meaning "anointed one." Among certain groups in first-century Palestinian Judaism, the title was applied to an expected royal leader from the line of David who would restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). The political overtones of the title are played down by Luke and instead the Messiah of the Lord (Luke 2:26) or the Lord's anointed is the one who brings salvation to all humanity, Jew and Gentile (Luke 2:29-32). **Lord** is the most frequently used title for Jesus in Luke and Acts. In the NT it is also applied to Yahweh, as it is in the OT. When used of Jesus it points to his transcendence and dominion over humanity. (NAB)

The word **savior** is common in Luke and Paul, but seldom found elsewhere in the NT. The people under Rome's rule came to call the emperor "savior", and Christians

took the word and used it for Christ. (Internet -- Crosswalks site)

Verse 9:

the angel of the Lord -- we discussed this phrase as it was spoken to Joseph in Matthew as being a messenger of God.

glory of the Lord -- The wondrous presence of God the Redeemer. In the OT this phrase is associated with great redeeming acts of God (Exodus 14:4 and 18; Exodus 16:7), and especially with the Ark or Temple (Exodus 40:34f.; I Kings 8:11). Whereas Luke prefers to restrict the term “glory” to Jesus’ ascension or parousia (Luke 9:26, and 31f.; Luke 19:38; Luke 21:27; Luke 24:26; Acts 7:55), John applies it to the entire life of Jesus (John 1:14; John 2:11).

Verse 11:

The contents of the gospel are now revealed: the fulfillment of OT promises about a Davidic Messiah, the Lord’s Anointed, who is himself Savior and Lord. Note how three significant titles are given to Jesus in this one verse: Savior (*soter*), the Anointed (*christos*), and Lord (*kyrios*). For Luke the most significant title is Savior, for salvation is one of the main themes of his gospel. Among the Synoptists he alone employs this title. (JBC)

for all the people -- means in the first instance “to all Israel”. But it is quite possible that Luke intended the angel’s announcement to underscore the universalism of the gospel. (IB)

for you -- in verse 11 indicates the shepherds as being addressed in a representative capacity. (IB)

God is called **Savior** by the author of Isaiah 43:3 and 45:15, and pagans commonly used the title for the gods of their cults. Luke applies it elsewhere to Jesus only in Acts 5:31 and 13:23. It does not occur in Mark or Matthew. **Christ the Lord** is a combination of titles that reflects a developed Christology. Nowhere in Jewish literature is the Messiah regarded as a divine being. Jews would have spoken only of “the Lord’s Christ.” The angel’s words are to be authenticated by a sign. (IB)

First Summary in IB:

“Has been born for you.” This child has been born to shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night; to the humble, the lowly, to expectant hearts. And he was born “in the city of David.” Through the thought that the Messiah might come from Bethlehem, there echoes the great longing of Israel for the restoration of the glory which had been true in David’s time. With a yearning patriotism the Jewish people looked back to the age of the great and heroic king in whose reign Israel had been strong. Through subjection, captivity, and exile, through the rebirth of freedom, and then through the shadowed days when the heavy yoke of Rome was laid upon them, they kept the passionate hope that one of David’s line should rise to be a second and a mightier David. They hoped for a king who once more should set Israel free. But David represented not simply the greatness of a king. He had represented the immortal grandeur of the heart of humanity seeking after God. Not always in clear expression, yet instinctively Israel was seeking for one who should fulfill all the finer and invisible things for which David was remembered. David had been Israel’s hero not only as a warrior, but as a man--eager, impulsive, lovable, unselfish, brave--yet marked by more

than one dark sin which showed his kinship to the passionate weakness of all humanity. David stood as the type of soul which through struggle and defeat and hard-won victories pursues the warrior's road to God.

The world naturally would have expected Jesus' birth in a stable to be framed in some mighty event, some shaking of the earth and skies, some focusing of the whole world's attention upon this event which swiftly would dominate the age. Instead, there is a stripping away of all the world's pride before the immense simplicity of God. In this story of heavenly contrasts, where the humblest circumstances of our human life are lifted up into immortal poetry, the gospel of redemption is set forth. God, who is the source and meaning of all life, reveals himself in the little child coming unnoticed in the stable of the unregarded town.

Furthermore, just as it was in simplicity and lowliness that the life of Jesus began, so it was with the simple people and in simple places that most of his work was done. If his life entered this world through a little door, so also it was through little doors that as a man he went in and out. His friends were of the fishing fleet of Capernaum. The homes he knew were the little houses of ordinary people. He dealt with people in their ordinary occupations, and his parables were drawn from his observation of everyday working situations. Much of what he did with people was to make them feel how worthwhile their work could be, and to give them a new inspiration for what they had to do. He always made men and women know that what really mattered was not what they possessed, but what in their souls they tried to be. Too often we are forgetful of that simple truth, and continue to pursue our false and shallow satisfactions.

Second Summary in LToJC:

There is no adequate reason for questioning the historical accuracy of the date of December 25th as the date of Jesus' birth. All argumentation surrounding this date does nothing to contribute to the meaning of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection; thus it is quite simply superfluous to our discussion. MINE

It was on that wintry night of December 25th that shepherds watched the flocks destined for sacrificial services, in the very place consecrated by tradition as that where the Messiah was to be first revealed. Suddenly out of the surrounding silence of the night came the long-delayed announcement. Heaven and earth seemed to mingle, as suddenly an angel stood before their dazzled eyes, while the out streaming glory of the Lord seemed to enwrap them, as in a mantle of light. Surprise, awe and fear would be hushed into calm and expectancy, as from the angel they heard that what they saw did not mean judgment, but rather ushered in to waiting Israel the great joy of those good tidings which he brought--that the long-awaited Savior, Messiah, Lord was born in the City of David, and that they themselves might go and see, and recognize Him by the humbleness of the circumstances surrounding his Nativity.

6. Read Luke 2:12-13
(1) No references
7. Read Luke 2:14
(1) Luke 19:38

Luke 2:13-14

- 13 And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:
- 14 “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

The translated term **host** in the Greek is a military term for a band of soldiers. It was a common term in ancient Greek. The army announces peace in this instance. (Internet--Crosswalks site)

on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests -- the peace that results from the Christ event is for those whom God has favored with his grace. This reading is found in the oldest representatives of the Western and Alexandrian text traditions and is the preferred one. On the other hand, the Byzantine text tradition reads: “on earth peace, good will toward men.” The peace of which Luke’s gospel speaks (Luke 2:14; 7:50; 8:48; 10:5-6; 19:38 and 42; 24:36) is more than the absence of war as in the period of peace under Caesar Augustus; it also includes the security and well-being characteristic of peace in the OT. (NAB)

to those on whom his favor rests -- This is of God’s good pleasure. The phrase does not refer to the good dispositions of men themselves but to the partiality of God. God is not to be thought of as taking delight in man’s goodness but rather as bestowing goodness on man through his divine election and mercy. This phrase also has a parallel in the Dead Sea Scrolls. (JBC)

the heavenly host in the OT usually refers to the stars as objects of pagan worship (Acts 7:42). Here it is used of God’s entourage of angels as in I Kings 22:19 and II Chronicles 18:18. The Gloria in Excelsis is a messianic acclamation which anticipates that in 19:38. The consequence of the announcement of the birth in verse 11 results to God’s glory in heaven and inaugurates a new era on earth. If peace is to be understood in the light of its Hebrew counterpart (*shalom*), it could be paraphrased “salvation.” “Peace, good will toward men” translates the text of inferior manuscripts, while “among men with whom he is pleased” interprets a better-attested reading. “Men of God’s good pleasure need not be restricted to the nation Israel. Luke and his readers would have identified them with the Christian community (“to all the people” of verse 10). (IB)

First Summary from IB:

Peace among men is the climax of life’s great hope, but it is not the beginning. The beginning is the adoration of God himself. Our improvements cannot come from our human schemes, it must come from God. The whole message of the NT is built upon gratitude for God’s grace. We must open our minds and hearts in thankfulness for what God has given in Christ before we can hope that the distracted elements within our lives will fall into place and give us a peace that cannot be destroyed.

Second Summary from LToJC:

It was as if the attendant angels had only waited for the signal. As when the sacrifice was laid on the altar in the Temple, the music burst forth in three sections, each marked by the blast of the priests’ silver trumpets. Therefore, when the angel had spoken, a multitude of heaven’s host stood forth to hymn the good tidings he had brought. What

they sang was only a reflex of what the angel had announced. It told in the language of praise the character, the meaning, the result, of what had taken place. Heaven took up the strain of glory while the earth echoed it as peace, and it fell on the ears and hearts of mankind as good pleasure. Only once before had the words of the angel's hymn fallen upon mortal's ears. That was when to Isaiah's rapt vision, Heaven's High Temple had opened, and the glory of Yahweh had swept its courts, almost breaking down the trembling posts that bore its boundary gates. Now this same glory wrapped around the shepherds on Bethlehem's plains. Before the angel's hymn had heralded the announcement of the Kingdom coming, now the King had come. Then it had been that of a prophetic anticipation; now it was that of an evangelic fulfillment.

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8. Read Luke 2:15-16
(1) No references

Luke 2:15-16

- 15 When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."

- 16 So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.

There is a sense of urgency in the way the original Greek documents the speech of the angels. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[to see this thing](#) -- The Greek word could also mean "this word" which reflects a Hebrew word which can mean both "word" and "event." (JBC)

The shepherds verify the angel's announcement, and their public account of their experience is greeted with astonishment in the following verses. (IB)

Summary from LToJC:

The hymn had ceased, the light had faded out of the sky, and the shepherds were now alone. But the angelic message remained with them; and the sign, which was to guide them to the Infant Christ, lit their rapid way up the terraced height to where, as they entered Bethlehem the lamp swinging over the inn directed them to the strangers of the house of David, who had come from Nazareth. Though it seems as if, in the hour of her utmost need, the Virgin-Mother had been ministered to by loving hands, yet what had happened in the stable must soon have become known in the inn. Perhaps friendly women were still passing to and fro on errands of mercy when the shepherds reached the "stable." There they found, perhaps not what they had expected, but as they had been told. The holy group only consisted of the humble Virgin-Mother, the lowly carpenter of Nazareth, and the Baby that was laying in the manger. What further passed we do not know, expect that having seen it for themselves, the shepherds told what had been spoken to them about this child, to all around--in the "stable", in the fields, probably also in the Temple, to which they would bring their flocks, thereby preparing the minds of a Simeon, of an Anna, and of all them that looked for salvation in Israel.

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9. Read Luke 2:17-18
(1) No references
10. Read Luke 2:19-20
(1) No references

Luke 2:17-20

- 17 When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child.
- 18 All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds.
- 19 And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.
- 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

The shepherds spoke to others of what they had witnessed with their own eyes. They couldn't keep silent about this great event. And Mary kept piecing together all these events that had happened to her. They were her food and drink. She was not astonished, instead she was filled with holy awe. In her mind Mary would go over each detail in the words of Gabriel and the shepherds and compare the sayings with the facts so far developed and ponder over it all with a mother's high hope and joy. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Mary had been prepared for all that had happened (1:26-38), and therefore did not share in the general surprise. Instead she treasured a memory of the events and reflected on them. Those who believe that the shepherds' watch and the angels' chorus are to be taken literally can claim that the story is based on this firsthand report. But it is unwise to impose the prose of history on the poetry of faith. Had Jesus' mission as "Christ the Lord" been attested by such a portent at his birth, it would be difficult to understand the later attitude of his parents (2:50) and fellow townsmen (4:22). (IB)

1st Summary of IB:

The shepherds had just poured out their amazement over what they had seen and heard. These men, simple as they were, were sure that they had looked into God's reality. Those who heard it were hushed in wonder.

The shepherds themselves were simple, lowly people. The place where they stood at the moment in the stable at Bethlehem was in itself as common and uninspiring as any place could be. There is always the danger that people insisting on what they call reality may pull down the shutters across the windows of wonder and dwell in the grudging darkness of the narrow facts. They may discount the tidings brought to them of something larger than anything that is already known--may say that these are mere babblings, ecstatic utterings, which have no proof in experience, pretty fantasies, and why should we bother to take them as though they were serious truth?

All great happenings of life can, if we choose, be left on the dull level of common prose, and equally if we choose, can be lifted up into poetry. It will depend upon the suggestions which we do or do not welcome. Some potentially great event can be a mere

common thing which happens in a stable, or it can, instead, be illuminated by the halo of a divine significance.

According to the beautiful suggestion of the Gospel, the mother of Jesus held in her heart all the intimations of a divine significance for her child which had come to her in the moments of highest inspiration. She had felt then with great certainty what God wanted her to know. She had not let the vision fade.

The shepherds had had their great experience, and now it was over. They had been to the stable in Bethlehem, and they could not linger there. They returned to their familiar pastures and the commonplace tending of their sheep. And [the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them](#). On the way back they took with them undimmed and undiminished the expansion of the soul which had been theirs in their most exalted moments.

2nd Summary of LToJC:

And now the hush of wondering expectancy fell once more on all who heard what was told by the shepherds. This time not only in the hill-country of Judea, but within the wider circle that embraced Bethlehem and the Holy City. And yet it seemed all so sudden, so strange. That on such a slender thread as the feeble throb of an infant-life the salvation of the world should hang--with no special care to watch over its safety, no better shelter provided it than a stable, no other cradle than a manger.

SESSION 7

Upon all His history seemed to lie such wondrous light, that Mary could only see the path behind, so far as she had traveled upon it; while upon that on which she was to move, was such dazzling brightness that she could scarce look upon the present and dared not gaze towards the future.

At the very outset of this history, and increasingly during its course, the question meets us now. If the angelic message to the Virgin Mother was a reality, and her motherhood so supernatural, how she could have been apparently so ignorant of what was to come -- even misunderstood it so often. Strange that she should have "pondered in her heart" the shepherd's account; stranger, that afterwards she should have wondered at his lingering in the Temple among Israel's teachers; and strangest of all that at the first of His miracles, a mother's fond pride should have so harshly broken in upon the Divine melody of His work, by striking a keynote so different from that to which His life had been set; or that afterwards, in the height of his activity, loving fears, if not doubts, should have prompted her to interrupt what evidently she had not as yet comprehended in the fullness of its meaning. Might we not rather have expected that the Virgin-Mother from the inception of this Child's life would have understood that He was truly the Son of God? The question, like so many others, requires only to be stated clearly to find its emphatic answer. For, had it been so His history, His human life, of which every step is of such infinite importance to mankind, would not have been possible. Apart from all thoughts of the deeper necessity, both as regarded His mission and the salvation of the world, of a true human development of gradual consciousness and personal life, Christ could not, in any true sense, have been subject to His parents, if they had fully understood that He was Divine; nor could He, in that case have been watched, as He "grew in wisdom and in favor with God and men." Such knowledge would have broken the bond of His humanity to ours, by severing that which bound Him as a child to His mother. We could not have become His brethren, had He not been truly the Virgin's son. The mystery of the Incarnation would have been needless and fruitless, had his humanity not been subject to all its right and ordinary conditions. And, applying the same principle more widely, we can thus, in some measure, understand why the mystery of His Divinity had to be kept silent while He was on earth. Had it been otherwise, the thought of His divinity would have proved so all-absorbing, as to render impossible that of His humanity, with all its lessons. The Son of God Most High, whom they worshipped, could never have been the loving Man, with whom they could hold such close converse. The bond which bound the Master to his disciples -- the Son of Man to humanity -- would have been dissolved; His teaching as a Man, the Incarnation, and the Tabernacling among men, in place of the former OT Revelation from heaven, would have become entirely impossible. In short, the distinctive NT element in our salvation would have been taken away. At the beginning of His life He would have anticipated the lessons of its end--not those of His death only, but of His Resurrection and Ascension, and of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

In all this we have only been taking the subjective point of view, not the objective. We have considered the earthward and not the heavenward aspect of his life. The heavenward aspect, though very real, lies beyond our present horizon. Not so the question as to the development of the Virgin-Mother's spiritual knowledge. Assuming

her to have occupied, in the fullest sense, the standpoint of Jewish Messianic expectancy, and, remembering also, that she was so “highly favored” of God, still, there was not as yet anything, nor could there be for many years, to lead her beyond what might be called the utmost height of Jewish belief. On the contrary, there was much connected with His true humanity to keep her back. For narrow as, to our retrospective thinking, the boundary-line seems between Jewish belief and that in the hypostatic union of the two natures, the passage from the one to the other represented such tremendous revolution, as to imply direct Divine teaching. An illustrative instance will prove this better than argument. We read, in a commentary on the opening words of Genesis 15:18 that when God made the covenant with Abram, He revealed to him both the current dispensation and the one to come, which is correctly explained as referring to the days of the Messiah. Jewish tradition, therefore, here asserts exactly what Jesus stated in these words: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.” Yet, we know what storm of indignation the enunciation of it called forth among the Jews!

Thus it was, that every event connected with the Messianic manifestation of Jesus would come to the Virgin-Mother as a fresh discovery and a new surprise. Each event, as it took place, stood isolated in her mind; not as part of a whole which she would anticipate, nor as only one link in a chain; but as something quite by itself. She knew the beginning, and she knew the end; but she knew not the path which led from one to the other; and each step in it was a new revelation. Hence it was, that she so carefully treasured in her heart every new fact, piecing each to the other, until she could read from it the great mystery that He, whom Incarnate she had borne, was, indeed the Son of the living God. And as it was natural, so it was well that it should be so. For, thus only could she truly, because self-unconsciously, as a Jewish woman and mother, fulfill all the requirements of the Law as regarded herself and her child.

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1. THE CIRCUMCISION AND NAMING OF JESUS

Luke 2:21

1. Read Luke 2:21

(1) Genesis 17:12

(3) Luke 1:31

(2) Matthew 1:21

Luke 2:21

21 When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Jesus would be incorporated into the people of Israel through circumcision. (NAB) [We are reminded here of the circumcision ceremony in Zecharias and Elizabeth’s home. MINE]

The naming was a part of the ceremony of circumcision. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

In this ceremony of circumcision Jesus is formally stamped as a member of God’s chosen people, through whom world salvation was to be achieved. Such hopes were now

fulfilled in Jesus, even in his name (Luke 1:31). (JBC)

Joseph and Mary conformed to the practice of pious Jewish families by circumcising their son, presenting him in the temple, and offering a sacrifice for their purification as the law prescribed. The temple scene is the main center of interest. It provides Luke with an opportunity to tell of Simeon and Anna and their prophetic insight concerning the child and his mission. (IB)

Jesus' infancy followed the pattern of orthodox Jewish piety, and Luke's readers are provided with further evidence that Christianity had its roots in Judaism. But the emphasis of the verse is on the naming of the child. Luke is careful to point out that the name was given in accordance with the angel's proclamation. (IB)

1st Summary of IB:

In much of the NT the word "circumcision" is associated with ridicule. In the thought of Paul the party of the circumcision meant the stubborn reactionaries who blocked the new gospel of Christ's saving spirit. Yet here is the fact that Jesus himself was circumcised. One can note here the value to be found in observing traditions. By the grace of God, Mary and Joseph had been given the task of nurturing the child Jesus, and they had the desire to see that his life should be linked with all the rich inheritance of Israel. Jesus himself kept that same spirit. He came as a new creator for the values of life, but he never overturned the traditions, customs, or values of his Jewish background. However worthy of regard old forms and ways had been, they must be broken through if and when they become so hardened that they shut life up instead of letting it expand. The natural thing is that the old customs shall be reverently carried on. Every rite and ceremony originally was an effort to express a spiritual purpose. As long as it does, it is to be revered. When it fails to do that, then the spirit must seek expression in some new and living way.

2nd Summary of LToJC:

The first requirement of the law was Circumcision which represented voluntary subjection to the conditions of the Law. The ceremony took place, as in all ordinary circumstances, on the eighth day, when the Child received the Angel-given name Jesus.

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m. THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE Luke 2:22-38

2. Read Luke 2:22-38 entirely through one time.
3. Read Luke 2:22
(1) Leviticus 12:2-8
4. Read Luke 2:23
(1) Exodus 13:2 and 12

5. Read Luke 2:24
(1) No references

Luke 2:22-24

- 22 When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of
Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord,
23 just as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the womb shall
be consecrated to the Lord,”
24 and to offer the sacrifice of “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,” in
accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

Verse 22:

The presentation of Jesus in the Temple depicts the parents of Jesus as devout Jews, faithful observers of the law of the Lord (Luke 2:23-24, 39); that is, the law of Moses. In this respect, they are described in a fashion similar to the parents of John (Luke 1:6), and of Simeon (Luke 2:25) and Anna (Luke 2:36-37). (NAB)

their purification -- Syntactically, **their** must refer to Mary and Joseph, even though the Mosaic law never mentions the purification of the husband. Recognizing this problem, some Western scribes have altered the text to read “his purification,” understanding the presentation of Jesus in the temple as a form of purification; the Vulgate version has a Latin form that could be either “his” or “her”. According to the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 12:2-8), the woman who gives birth to a boy is unable for forty days to touch anything sacred or to enter the temple area by reason of her legal impurity. At the end of this period she is required to offer a year-old lamb as a burnt offering and a turtledove or two young pigeons, as Mary does here. They took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord: as firstborn son (Luke 2:7), Jesus was consecrated to the Lord as the law required (Exodus 13:2, 12), but there was no requirement that this be done at the temple. The concept of a presentation at the temple is probably derived from I Samuel 1:24-28, where Hannah offers the child Samuel for sanctuary services. The law further stipulated (Numbers 3:47-48) that the firstborn son should be redeemed by the parents through their payment of five shekels to a member of a priestly family (about \$2.50). About this legal requirement Luke is silent. (NAB)

The mother was Levitically unclean for forty days after the birth of a son (Leviticus 12:1-8). Every first-born son was redeemed by the sacrifice (Exodus 13:2-12) as a memorial of the sparing of the Israelite families (Numbers 18:15). The cost would be about \$2.50 in our currency. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The plural “their” is textually preferable to “her” (in Syriac version) or “his” (in D and in VL). Mary is thus seen united with Jesus and possibly with Joseph in the Temple ceremony. Mary’s uncleanness was not moral but only ceremonial (Leviticus 12:2-4); but just as Jesus followed the full Mosaic Law and completely immersed himself in humanity, thereby to transform it, so Mary is presented as one with all womankind in giving birth to her child. Her purification, like Jesus’ act of redemption, belongs to everyone of Israel. This interpretation agrees with the earlier presentation of Mary in the symbol of the Jerusalem Temple (1:35). (JBC)

to present him to the Lord -- That is, to Yahweh. Jesus' presentation in the Temple, in accordance with Exodus 13:1-16, is a climactic moment in the Infancy Narrative; throughout the Gospel Jerusalem will occupy a principal spot. Luke says nothing about Jesus' being redeemed or brought back (Numbers 18:15f.); he was possessed by his Heavenly Father even before this ceremony; this act formalized or externalized what was and would remain always true. (JBC)

Their purification became her purification in later manuscripts in order to make the text conform to the regulation in Leviticus 12:6. As a Jewish mother, Mary was considered "unclean" for seven days after the birth of her child (Leviticus 12:2) and was expected to remain in ceremonial isolation for another thirty-three days (Leviticus 12:4)-- a total of forty days in Bethlehem. Luke believes Joseph was also required to observe this legal provision. (IB)

Verse 23:

The Law did not require that the child be brought to Jerusalem. The purification concerned the mother, the presentation the son. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

a pair of turtle doves -- rather than a year-old lamb, Mary and Joseph give the "offering of the poor"; one bird was for a holocaust of adoration [a burnt-offering], the other for a "sin" offering (Leviticus 12:6-8; Leviticus 5:7-10). (JBC)

Verses 22b-23 is an interruption of the main narrative. The rite of presentation was distinct from that of purification, but Luke has evidently confused the two. The quotation is a free one from Exodus 13:2. The law provided for the "redemption" of the first-born male by the offering of a substitute (Exodus 13:13). Luke omits any notice of this. He interprets Jesus' presentation as an act of dedication to the service of God in the light of the OT story about Samuel (I Samuel 1:24-28). (IB)

Verse 24:

The offspring of the poor, costing about sixteen cents, while a lamb would cover nearly \$2.00. The "young of pigeons" is the literal meaning. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The quotation is from Leviticus 12:8. It details the sacrifice that was to be offered for purification by a mother who could not afford a lamb. (IB)

Summary from LToJC:

After Jesus' circumcision there were two other legal ordinances that still remained to be observed. The firstborn son of every household was, according to the Law, to be "redeemed" of the priest at the price of five shekels of the sanctuary. The Rabbis had added here many needless, and even repulsive, details. The following, however, are of practical interest for our purposes. The earliest period of presentation was thirty-one days after birth, so as to make the legal month quite complete. The child must have been the firstborn of his mother; neither father nor mother must be of Levitic descent; and the child must be free from all such bodily blemishes as would have disqualified him for the priesthood. It was a thing much dreaded, that the child should die before his redemption; but if his father died in the interval, the child had to redeem himself when he became of age. The Rabbinic law expressly states that the shekels were to be of "Tyrian weight," the value of the "redemption money" would amount to about ten or twelve shillings, or \$2.50. The redemption could be made from any priest, and attendance in the Temple was not required. It was otherwise with the purification of the mother. The Rabbinic Law

fixed this at forty-one days after the birth of a son, and eighty-one after the birth of a daughter, so as to make the Biblical terms quite complete. But it might take place later--notably, when attendance on any of the great feasts brought a family to Jerusalem. Therefore, we read of cases when a mother would offer several sacrifices of purification at the same time. Furthermore, the woman was not required to be personally present at all when her offering was presented, or rather provided for--for example, by the representatives of the laity, who took part in the daily services for the various districts from which they came. This is also especially provided for in the Talmud. But mothers who were within a convenient distance of the temple, and especially the more earnest among them, would naturally attend personally in the temple. In such cases, when practical, the redemption of the first-born, and the purification of his mother, would be combined. Such was undoubtedly the case with the Virgin-Mother and her Son.

It was for this twofold purpose that the Holy Family went up to the Temple when the prescribed days were completed. The ceremony at the redemption of a first-born son was, no doubt, more simple than that of today. It consisted of the formal presentation of the child to the priest, accompanied by two short benedictions--one for the law of redemption, and the other for the gift of a firstborn son, after which the redemption money would be paid. This rite must have been most solemn, since in such a place they would remember its symbolic significance as the expression of God's claim over each family in Israel.

As regards the rite of purification of the mother, the scantiness of information has led to serious misstatements. It does not compare with our concept of the "churaching of women" since this tradition consists of thanksgiving. The purification of the mother was primarily a sin-offering for the Levitical defilement symbolically attaching to the beginning of life, and a burnt-offering that marked the restoration of communion with God. Remember that the sacrifice for purification might be brought in the absence of the mother. Similar mistakes prevail as to the pattern the ceremony followed. It is not the case that the woman was sprinkled with blood, and then pronounced clean by the priest, or that prayers were offered on the occasion. The service consisted simply of the statutory sacrifice. This is what in ecclesiastical language was termed an offering; that is, "ascending and descending" according to the means of the offerer. The sin-offering was, in all cases, a turtle-dove or a young pigeon. While the more wealthy brought a lamb for a burnt-offering, the poor might substitute for it a turtle-dove, or a young pigeon. The pattern of the ceremony directed that the neck of the sin-offering was to be broken, but the head was not to be entirely severed; that some of the blood should be sprinkled at the south-western angle of the altar, below the red line, which ran around the middle of the altar, and that the rest should be poured out at the base of the altar. The entire flesh belonged to the priests, and had to be eaten within the enclosure of the sanctuary. The rubric for the burnt-offering of a turtle-dove or a young pigeon was somewhat more intricate. The substitution of a young pigeon for a young lamb was expressly designated "the poor's offering." While a lamb would probably cost about 3 shillings, the average value of a pair of turtle-doves, for both the sin- and burnt-offering, would be about eightpence (about 4 cents), and on one occasion fell so low as twopence (about 1 cent). The temple-price of the meat- and drink-offerings were fixed once a month; and special officials instructed the intending offerers, and provided them with what was needed.

There was also a special “superintendent of turtle-doves and pigeons” required for certain purifications, and the holder of that office is mentioned with praise in the Mishnah. Indeed, much depended upon his uprightness. At any rate as regarded those who brought the poor’s offering, the purchasers of pigeons or turtle-doves would, as a rule, have to deal with him.

In the Court of Women there were thirteen trumpet-shaped chests for contributions, called “trumpets.” Into the third of these they who brought the poor’s offering, like the Virgin Mother, were to drop the price of the sacrifices which were needed for their purification. As we infer, the superintending priest must have been stationed here (1) to inform the offerer of the price of the turtle-doves and (2) to see that all was in order. The offerer of the poor’s offering would not be required to deal directly with the sacrificing priest. At a certain time in the day this third chest was opened, and half of its contents would be applied to burnt-offerings, and the other half to sin-offerings. Sacrifices were thus provided for a corresponding number of those who were to be purified without shaming the poor, without needlessly disclosing the character of impurity, and without causing unnecessary bustle and work. Though this mode of procedure would not be obligatory, no doubt it would be that that was usually followed.

In imagination, we can now follow the Virgin-Mother in the temple. Her child had been given up to the Lord, and received back from him. She had entered the Court of Women, probably the “Gate of the Women,” on the north side, and deposited the price of her sacrifice in Trumpet #3 which was close to the raised dais, or gallery, where the women worshipped, apart from the men. Now the sound of the organ would announce throughout the vast temple buildings that the incense was about to be kindled on the Golden Altar. This was also a summons to those who were to be purified. The chief of the ministrant lay-representatives of Israel on duty (the so-called “station-men”) ranged those, who presented themselves before the Lord as offerers of special sacrifices, within the wickets on either side of the great Nicanor Gate, at the top of the fifteen steps which led up from the Court of the Women to the Court of Israel. It was, as if they were to be brought nearest to the Sanctuary; as if theirs were to be especially “the prayers” that rose in the cloud of incense from the Golden Altar; as if for them especially the sacrifices were laid on the Altar of Burnt-Offering; as if theirs was a larger share in the benediction which, spoken by the lips of the priests, seemed like Yahweh’s answer to the prayers of the people; theirs especially the expression of joy symbolized in the drink-offering, and the hymn of praise that filled the Temple. The purification-service, with such unspoken prayer and praise as would be the outcome of a grateful heart, was soon ended, and they who shared in it were Levitically clean. Now all stain was removed, and, as the Law put it, they might again partake of sacred offerings.

In such sacred offering, was the Virgin-Mother immediately to share. It has been observed that by the side of every humiliation connected with the Humanity of the Messiah, the glory of his Divinity was also made to shine forth. If he was born of the humble Maiden of Nazareth, an angel announced his birth; if the infant-savior was cradled in a manger, the shining host of heaven hymned His advent. And so afterwards, if he hungered and was tempted in the wilderness, angels ministered to him, even as an angel strengthened Him in the agony of the garden. If he submitted to baptism, the Voice and vision from heaven attested to his Sonship; if enemies threatened, He could

miraculously pass through them; if the Jews assailed, there was the Voice of God to glorify Him; if He was nailed to the cross, the sun hid its brightness and the earth quaked; if he was laid in a tomb, angels kept their watch, and announced his rising. Mary's offering might be considered a "eucharistic offering" so to speak. The record of which is the more precious since the Rabbinical writings make no allusion to the existence of the party, whose representatives we are soon to meet. Yet they were the true outcome of the spirit of the OT, and, as such, at this time, the special recipients of the "Spirit" of the OT.

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(1) SIMEON MEETS JESUS
Luke 2:25-35

6. Read Luke 2:25-29
(1) No references
7. Read Luke 2:30
(1) Isaiah 40:5 LXX (3) Luke 3:6
(2) Isaiah 52:10
8. Read Luke 2:31
(1) No references
9. Read Luke 2:32
(1) Isaiah 42:6 (4) Acts 13:47
(2) Isaiah 46:13 (5) Acts 26:23
(3) Isaiah 49:6
10. Read Luke 2:33-35

Luke 2:25-35

- 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the holy Spirit was upon him.
- 26 It had been revealed to him by the holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord.
- 27 He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him,
- 28 he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:
- 29 "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word,
- 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation,
- 31 which you prepared in sight of all the people,
- 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel."
- 33 The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him;
- 34 and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be

contradicted
35 (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Verse 25:

The Greek word for [devout](#) is used only by Luke (Acts 2:5; 8:2; 22:12) in the NT. It was a common word in ancient Greek from Plato on. It means taking hold well, or carefully and reverently, circumspectly. [Upon him](#) is the explanation of his lively Messianic hope. It was due to the Holy Spirit that Simeon and Anna are representatives of real piety at this time of spiritual scarcity and deadness. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[Awaiting the consolation of Israel](#) -- Simeon here, and later Anna who speaks about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem, represent the hopes and expectations of the faithful and devout Jews who at this time were looking forward to the restoration of God's rule in Israel. The birth of Jesus brings these hopes to fulfillment. (NAB)

[Simeon, just and devout](#) -- The adjectives used here denote care in observing the moral obligations of the Law, a care springing from a healthy fear of the Lord (Acts 2:5; 8:2; 22:12). [consolation of Israel](#) -- According to the Rabbis, this denoted the final, unrecorded words that passed between Elijah and Elisha (II Kings 2:11) and that would be made known when Elijah reappeared (1:17). [Holy Spirit](#) -- God at work in saving his people (Joel 3; Acts 2). (JBC)

Some interpreters have identified [Simeon](#) with a rabbi of the early first century A.D. who was the son of Hillel and the father of Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3); but the name was too common among Jews to warrant such an inference. Verses 26 and 29 imply that the prophet was an aged man. [The consolation of Israel](#) means “the fulfillment of Jewish messianic hopes” (as it is often found in rabbinical literature). The author of II Peter does justice to OT and early Christian ideas when he says, “No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (II Peter 1:21). Paul had laid down a rule of thumb by which men might distinguish true revelations by the [Holy Spirit](#) from the false (I Corinthians 12:1-3). [The Lord's Christ](#) is a pre-Christian Jewish title that means “God's Messiah” -- “God's Anointed One.” (IB)

Verse 26:

[The Lord's anointed](#) -- That Jesus should here be called the Anointed or the Messiah is indicative of composition after his baptism. (JBC)

Verse 28:

Simeon was inspired to come [into the temple](#) at the right moment. When Jesus' parents brought in the child Jesus, the prophecy that he should live to see the Messiah was fulfilled. [To do for him according to the custom of the law](#) must refer to the rite of presentation, for the rite of purification did not concern the child. (IB)

The use of the Nunc Dimittis in Christian liturgy has been traced to as early as the fifth century. Whether it ever circulated in the primitive church as a hymn after the fashion of the Magnificat and the Benedictus is difficult to determine. It lends itself to Luke's interest in stressing the universalism of the gospel. While the Christ was still a baby in arms, a Jewish prophet foresaw that his messianic salvation was intended for all mankind. (IB)

This verse means that Simeon held Jesus in the curve or inner angle of the arm. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The rabbis took children into their arms in order to bless them. The Greek word implies that Simeon “received” what was being presented to him. (JBC)

Verse 29:

This verse is full of rapture and vivid intensity like the best of the Psalm. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Simeon, most probably a member or close associate of the Sadducee group, must have waited amidst great suffering, as he witnessed the priestly betrayal of many sacred obligations. [dismiss in peace](#) -- Simeon is the watchman released from his duty. [servant](#) -- The Greek implies the difficult service of Simeon’s days in the Temple. (JBC)

The introductory words of the psalm are a statement of fact not a prayer. The oracle -- [according to thy word](#) refers to verse 26 -- has been fulfilled, and Simeon is content to die. The figure in the Greek text is that of a master freeing his slave. (IB)

Verse 31:

Not merely the Jews. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[all peoples](#) -- The universal scope of salvation reflects Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 52:10. Revelation under the image of light is characteristic of the literature of John (John 8:12; 12:46; I John 1:5 - 2:27). When the glory of the Lord descended upon the Ark, Moses could not enter lest he die (Exodus 33:18-20; 40:35); having seen the glory, Simeon can now die peacefully. (JBC)

Verse 32:

The Messiah is to be light for the Gentiles in darkness and glory for Israel (Romans 9:1-5; Isaiah 49:6). The word Gentiles originally meant just a crowd or company, then it became a term for a race or nation, still later it was used to signify the nations other than Israel or the people of God. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The [salvation](#) that Simeon had seen -- “the Lord’s Christ of verse 26 -- was intended for all peoples.

Verse 33:

Luke merely employs here the language of ordinary custom. If one wonders why they marveled at Simeon’s words after what they had heard from Gabriel, Elizabeth, and the shepherds, one should bear in mind that every parent is astonished and pleased at the fine things others see in their child. It is a mark of unusual insight for others to see so much that is obvious to the parent. Simeon’s prophecy had gone beyond the angel’s outline and it was surprising that he should know anything about the child’s destiny. (Internet--Crosswalks site)

Joseph is substituted for [his father](#) in inferior manuscripts. The amazement of Jesus’ parents would be in order if the story of Simeon’s prescience belonged originally to a source that knew nothing of the angel’s annunciation and the nativity narrative. Joseph and Mary learn for the first time that their child is to be God’s Messiah. Another explanation: Jesus’ father and mother were astonished at the declaration that he was to be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles”, as well as the savior of Israel. (IB)

Verse 34:

The falling of some and the rising of others is what is meant. He will be a stumbling-block to some (Isaiah 8:14; Matthew 21:42, 44; Romans 9:33; I Peter 2:16)

who love darkness rather than light (John 3:19), he will be the cause of rising for others (Romans 6:4, 9; Ephesians 2:6). Jesus is the magnet of the ages. He draws some while others he repels. (Internet--Crosswalks site)

Simeon blessed them -- He proclaimed the fulfillment of Messianic blessings in them and announced their involvement in the continuation of these blessings among other men. **for the fall and rise of many** -- The reference is most probably to an idea found in Isaiah 8:14; 28:16. The goals and goodness, preached and lived by the Messiah, force all men to face up to their great sinfulness (their "fall"). This knowledge can completely destroy, as it will the proud; or it can prompt the humble to turn to the Messiah and through him to rise to new life. The Greek word for "rise" is elsewhere used in Luke exclusively for resurrection from the dead. (JBC)

Verse 35:

A large sword is what is meant here. It occurs in the LXX as a description of Goliath's sword (I Samuel 17:51). How little Mary understood the meaning of Simeon's words that seemed so out of place in the midst of the glorious things already spoken, a sharp thorn in their roses, a veritable bitter-sweet. But Mary will stand by the cross of her son with this very sword pierced clean through her soul. A passing cloud perhaps passed over Mary's heart, already puzzled with rapture and ecstasy. Unveiled, or revealed, expresses God's purpose in the mission of the Messiah. He is to test men's thoughts and purposes. They will be compelled to take a stand for Christ or against him which is true even today. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

And you yourself a sword will pierce -- Mary herself will not be untouched by the various reactions to the role of Jesus (verse 34). Her blessedness as mother of the Lord will be challenged by her son who describes true blessedness as "hearing the word of God and observing it" (Luke 11:27-28 and Luke 8:20-21). (NAB)

a sword will pierce -- Some of the Church Fathers (Origen, Chrysostom, Basil, Cyril of Alexandria) interpreted the sword as one of doubt or hesitation in faith; but this meaning seems unlikely in the context of the Infancy Narrative where Mary is extolled. The sword could be indicative of the sorrow experienced by a humble person before the demands of an exalted vocation, by a delicately thoughtful person before the profound mystery of salvation, or by a sympathetic person before the revenge inflicted on the innocent. (JBC)

Simeon pronounced his blessing on both parents but addressed this further prediction only to the mother. This involves a certain awkwardness in style that is also apparent in the parenthesis in verse 35a. Perhaps Luke substituted Mary his mother for "them" in an earlier form of Simeon's prophecy and then introduced the prediction of Mary's grief at the tragic fate of her son. Mark fails to mention Joseph, when he enumerates members of Jesus' family (Mark 6:3), and Matthew and Luke make no reference to him in the body of their Gospels. If it is legitimate to infer from that that Joseph died before the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, one can account for the hypothetical changes in verses 34-35. Only Mary was to witness the fulfillment of Simeon's words, and she herself was to suffer bitterly in the course of it. But this is to support one hypothesis by another, and it must be admitted that even the rest of the prophecy suggests reflection after the event. God has ordained this child to separate the righteous from the unrighteous among many in Israel. Some are to reject him and fall

(Isaiah 8:14-15); others are to accept him and rise. He is to be a [sign](#) (cf. 11:20) that many will dispute. This is part of the purpose of God, for by their attitude to the Christ, men will reveal their true nature. (IB)

1st Summary from IB:

The Incarnation does not speak of small things or sweet things only. It points forward to something which is noble because of the sternness in it. The child who was born in Bethlehem would grow up into the man whose spiritual mission was not to send peace but a sword. To Israel and to all people he would bring a judgment, according to which men would fall or rise.

All real life has an element of tragedy to it. It is only through tragedy that fulfillment will come. The great truth is that it is only those who have suffered who can reveal the full meaning of life for other souls. The sword of affliction to a human heart may sometimes seem to be only disaster; but by a strange paradox, the wound it makes may so enlarge that heart with sympathy and understanding that others in their need will turn to it for interpretation and inspiration. In any place and in any century sorrow may be the redeeming sword of revelation. Any one who wishes for a religion without tears must find it difficult to adjust one's beliefs to the teachings of the NT and to the facts of life.

2nd Summary from LToJC:

The parents of Jesus had brought Him into the temple for presentation and redemption when they were met by one, whose venerable figure must have been well known in the city and the sanctuary. In the person of Simeon was combined three characteristics of OT piety: (1) justice (his relation and bearing to God and man); (2) fear of God (in opposition to the boastful self-righteousness of the Pharisee party); and above all (3) longing expectancy (of the near fulfillment of the great promises--the consolation of Israel). The Holy Spirit was upon him; and by that same Spirit, the gracious divine answer to his heart's longing had been communicated to him. Now it was as promised to him. Coming "in the spirit" into the Temple, just as His parents were bringing the Infant Jesus, he took him into his arms and burst into rapt thanksgiving. Now, indeed, had God fulfilled His word. He was not to see death until after he had seen the Lord's Christ. Now did his Lord "dismiss" him "in peace." -- release him in blessed comfort from work and watch -- since he had actually seen that salvation, so long preparing for a waiting weary world; a glorious light, Whose rising would light up heathen darkness, and be the outshining glory around Israel's mission. There was nothing Judaic -- quite the contrary: only what was in the OT--in what he first said.

His unexpected appearance, the more unexpected deed and words, and that most unexpected form in which what was said of the Infant Christ was presented to their minds, filled the hearts of his parents with wonderment. And it was, as if their silent wonderment had been an unspoken question, to which the answer now came in words of blessing from an aged watcher. Mystic they seem, yet still prophetic. Now it was the personal, or rather the Judaic, aspect which, in broken utterances, was set before the Virgin Mother--as if the whole history of the Christ upon earth were passing in rapid vision before Simeon. That Infant, now again in the Virgin Mother's arms was to be a

stone of decision; a foundation and cornerstone, for fall or for uprising; a sign spoken against; the sword of deep personal sorrow would pierce the Mother's heart.

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(2) ANNA MEETS JESUS
Luke 2:36-38

11. Read Luke 36-38
(1) No references

Luke 2:36-38

- 36 There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage,
37 and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshipped night and day with fasting and prayer.
38 And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

Verse 36:

In old Greek writers use the term [prophetess](#) to mean a woman who interprets oracles. She was of a great age, possibly as much as 106 years, since she was probably 15 when she married, was married 7 years, and was a widow for 84 years. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[A prophetess, Anna](#) -- Rabbinical literature recognized seven prophetesses; Sarah;, Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Hannah--the mother of Samuel (I Samuel 2:1), Abigail--the wife of David (I Samuel 25:32), Huldah (II Kings 22:14), and Esther. The Bible also mentions the wife of the prophet Isaiah as a prophetess (Isaiah 8:3). These women witnessed to God's will, at least by their holiness of life, sometimes by speaking in his name. (JBC)

An aged [prophetess](#) also hailed the advent of God's Messiah. It is not certain from the Greek text whether we are to understand that she was eighty-four years of age or had been a widow for eighty-four years. A famous widow of Jewish apocryphal literature is said to have lived to the ripe old age of 105 (Judith 16:23). Anna's piety is described in terms of popular exaggeration. [At that very hour](#) presumably means at the time that Simeon uttered his prediction. [Of him](#) obviously refers to the child Jesus. The [redemption of Jerusalem](#) is equivalent to "the consolation of Israel" (verse 25); that is, the messianic age. (IB)

Verse 37:

She kept on, not leaving. The Spirit kept her in the temple as he had led Simeon into the temple. The meaning is that she never missed a service in the temple. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

It is scarcely necessary to discuss the curious suggestion that Anna actually lived in the Temple. No one, least of all a woman, permanently resided in the Temple,

although the High Priest had quarters there. (LToJC)

[until she was eighty-four](#) -- Anna would be 104 years old. This age may place her symbolically in the person of another devout widow, Judith, who lived to be 105 years old (Judith 16:23). Both Jewish and Christian tradition found an honorable place for widows in the service of the community (I Timothy 5:9f.). (JBC)

Verse 38:

[Coming up](#) probably means here that she came up and stood by as she listened to Simeon's wonderful words so that her own words form a kind of footnote to his. [Gave thanks](#) has the idea of a mutual agreement or of saying something before one. Anna was evidently deeply moved and repeated her thanksgiving and kept speaking "to all them that were looking for" (as in Luke 2:35 of Simeon) the redemption of Jerusalem. There was evidently a group of such spirits that gathered in the Temple -- either men around her and Simeon or whom she otherwise met from time to time. There was thus a nucleus of old saints in Jerusalem who were prepared for the coming of the Messiah when he at last appears as the Messiah in Jerusalem (John 2 and 3). These probably passed away. But they had a happy hour of hope and joy. The late manuscripts have "in Jerusalem" but "of Jerusalem" is the correct usage. What they meant by the "redemption of Jerusalem" is not clear, whether political or spiritual or both. Simeon was looking for the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25) and Zechariah (Luke 1:68) sang of redemption for Israel (Isaiah 40:2) (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[awaiting](#) -- the poise of those who receive salvation. (JBC)

[redemption of Jerusalem](#) -- the holy city represents the elect. (JBC)

1st Summary of IB:

Those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem were doubtless a minority. The majority of people then as now, had their eyes on something very different--on getting ahead with the day's business; on maintaining things as they were, as long as it was profitable to do so; perhaps on getting rich; but anyhow, not consciously on redemption. Yet there were also those whose great desire was on the plane of the spirit, the humble, simple, quiet people, men and women of prayer and of devotion.

2nd Summary from LToJC:

Simeon's was not the only hymn of praise that day. A special interest attaches to Anna who, coming at that very moment, responded in praise to God for the pledge she saw of the near redemption. A kind of mystery seems to invest this Anna. A widow, whose early emptiness had been followed by a long life of solitary mourning; one of those in whose home the tribal genealogy had been preserved. We infer from this, and from the fact that it was that of a tribe which had not returned to Palestine, that hers was a family of some distinction. Curiously enough, the tribe of Asher is celebrated in tradition for the beauty of its women, and their fitness to be married to the High-Priest, or King.

But Anna had a better claim to distinction than family-descent, or long, faithful memories of brief joys of home life. These many years she had spent in the sanctuary, in fasting and in prayer -- yet not of that self-righteous, self-satisfied kind which was of the essence of popular religion. Nor, as to the Pharisees around, was it the synagogue which was her constant and loved resort; but the Temple, with its symbolic and unspoken

worship, which Rabbinic self-assertion and rationalism were rapidly superseding, and for whose services, indeed, Rabbinism could find no real basis. Nor yet were “fasting and prayer” to her the all-in-all of religion, sufficient in themselves; sufficient also before God. Deepest in her soul was longing waiting for the redemption promised, and now surely near. To her heart the great hope of Israel appeared not so much, as to Simeon, in the light of “consolation,” but rather that of “redemption.” The seemingly hopeless exile of her own tribe, the political state of Judea, the condition--social, moral, and religious--of her own Jerusalem; all kindled in her, as in those who were like-minded, deep, earnest longing for the time of promised “redemption.” No place was so suited to her as was the Temple, with its services--the only thing free, pure, undefiled, and pointing forward and upward; no occupation so fitting as “fasting and prayer.” And blessed be God, there were others, perhaps many such, in Jerusalem. Though Rabbinic tradition ignored them, they were the salt which preserved the mass from festering corruption. To her as the representative, the example, friend and advisor of such, was it granted as prophetess to recognize Him, whose Advent, had been the theme of Simeon’s praise. And, day by day, to those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem, would she speak of Him whom her eyes had seen, though it must be in whispers and with bated breath. For they were in the city of Herod, and the stronghold of Pharisaism.

SESSION 8

With the presentation of the infant Messiah and Savior in the Temple, and his acknowledgment by the representatives of those earnest men and women who looked for His advent, the prologue (if we may call it this) to Luke closes. From whatever source its information was derived, perhaps its earlier portion from the Virgin-Mother, and the latter from Anna, or else both from Mary, its marvelous details could not have been told with greater simplicity, and elegant grace. On the other hand, the prologue to Matthew, while omitting the events found in Luke, records other incidents of the infancy of Jesus. The plan of these narratives, or the sources from which they may originally have been derived, may account for the omissions in either case. At first sight it may seem somewhat strange that the cosmopolitan Gospel of Luke should have described what took place in the Temple, and the homage of the Jews found within the Gospel of Matthew, which was intended primarily for the Jews, records only the homage of the Gentiles, and the circumstances which led to the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. (LToJC)

Before studying Matthew 2:1-12 and the arrival of the Magi, now seems the best time to provide some of the political history (the secular world) of the times. We see the name Herod the Great mentioned for the first time by Matthew. This Herod was the father of Herod Antipas who was ruler of Galilee during Jesus' adult years, and Herod Antipas possessed many of the same traits as his father.

Herod the Great made his way to the throne through an intensely painful history. Nearly two and a half centuries prior to this time, the Greek empire of Alexander fell to his successors. Then for nearly a century and a half it continued the battle-field of the Egyptian (the Ptolemies) and the Syrian (Seleucid) kings. Whereas the High Priest had once completely governed the land, now that same office of High Priesthood had become corrupt. In Jewish history, there was a noble figure known as Simon the Just who held the office of High Priest, yet it was his great grandson who bought from the Syrians (the Selucids) the High-priestly office of his brother, and adopted the heathen name Jason. Jason sought to Grecianize the people during the years he ruled as High Priest. Through bribery, this sacred office fell even lower when it was transferred to his brother Menelaus. Then followed the brief period of the terrible persecutions of Antiochus Ephiphanes. During this time of persecution, Judaism was nearly exterminated in Palestine. Ephiphanes had entered the Temple and desecrated it by tearing down its altars, and establishing heathen rites which involved the worship of Greek gods.

When they came to power, the Maccabee family called forth all the national elements left in Palestine, and they kindled afresh the smoldering religious feelings. In some ways it seemed to be a revival of OT times. Judas Maccabee defeated the best of the Syrian military with only a small band of inferior rebels on the anniversary of the desecration of the Temple. After this defeat, Judas Maccabee once again set up the altar of burnt-offering, and the people sensed that a new Theocracy was to be inaugurated. The ceremonial of that feast of the new dedication of the Temple is the Jewish feast of Hanukkah (or, the Feast of Lights)

This period of promise to the Jewish population was more brief than expected. The fervor and purity of the movement ceased rapidly. It may have been from the pressure of current circumstances, but it was anything but a pious, or even happy thought,

that Judas the Maccabee sought an alliance with the Romans. It was from the very beginning of Rome's entrance on the scene that Israel declined as a nation. For awhile all seemed prosperous. The Maccabees became both High Priests and Kings. Party-strife and worldliness, ambition and corruption, besides Grecianism on the throne, soon brought about the decline of morale and vigor, and led to the decay and decadence of the Maccabean house. Contention for the throne among the Maccabees led to the interference of the foreigner. When Pompey captured Jerusalem, and violated the sanctity of the Temple, he placed Hyrcanus II in possession of the High Priesthood--the last of the Maccabean rulers was virtually shorn of its power. The country was now tributary to Rome, and it was subject to the Governor of Syria. The shadow of political power passed from the feeble hands of Hyrcanus when shortly thereafter one of the Roman governors (Gabinus) divided the land into five districts, each independent of the others.

It was during this time of political intrigue that Herod the Great appeared on the stage of Jewish affairs, and it was he who was to give them their last decisive turn. About fifty years prior to his entry on the scene, the district of Idumea had been conquered by the Maccabean King Hyrcanus I. He had then forced its inhabitants to adopt Judaism. This district of Idumea is not to be thought of as the ancient or Eastern Edom. Rather it now stood in the hands of the Nabateans, and consisted of parts of southern Palestine which the Edomites had occupied since the Babylonian Exile, and it was especially a small district on the northern and eastern boundary of Judea, and below Samaria. After the district became Judean, its administration was entrusted to a governor. In the reign of the last of the Maccabees this office devolved on one Antipater, a man of equal cunning and determination. He successfully interfered in the unhappy dispute for the crown, which was at last decided by the sword of Pompey. Antipater took the part of the utterly weak Hyrcanus in that contest with his energetic brother Aristobulus, and became the virtual ruler, and Hyrcanus II became only a puppet in his hands. From the accession of Judas Maccabees in 166 B.C. to the year 68 B.C., when Jerusalem was taken by Pompey, only about a century had elapsed. 24 years later, the last of the Maccabees had given place to the son of Antipater--Herod the Great.

The settlement of Pompey did not prove lasting. Aristobulus, the brother and defeated rival of Hyrcanus, was still alive and his sons were even more energetic than he. The uprisings attempted by them, the interference of the Parthians on behalf of those who were hostile to Rome, and finally, the contentions for supremacy in Rome itself, made this period one of confusion, turmoil, and constant warfare in Palestine.

When Pompey was finally defeated by Julius Caesar, the prospects of Antipater and Hyrcanus seemed dark. They quickly changed sides, however, and timely help given to Caesar in Egypt brought to Antipater the title of Procurator of Judea, while Hyrcanus was left in the High-Priesthood. The office of High Priest was that of only head of the people by title, but with no real power in the office. The two sons of Antipater were now made governors: Phasaelus, the eldest son, became governor of Jerusalem while Herod, the youngest son of only 25 years of age, became governor of Galilee. In Galilee Herod displayed energy and determination in crushing a guerilla warfare, of which the deeper springs were probably nationalist. The execution of the leader of the guerillas brought Herod a summons to appear before the Great Sanhedrin of Jerusalem, for having claimed the power of executioner. When he came he was robed in purple, surrounded by his

body-guards, and supported by the express direction of the Roman Governor to Hyrcanus that he be acquitted. Even then, he would have fallen a victim to the well-grounded apprehensions of the Sanhedrin had he not been persuaded to withdraw from the city. He later returned at the head of an army, and was persuaded, with some difficulty by his father, to spare Jerusalem. In the meantime Caesar had named him Governor of Coele Syria (today's Lebanon).

On the murder of Caesar, and the possession of Syria by Cassius, Antipater and Herod again changed sides. They rendered such substantial service as to secure favor, and Herod was allowed to continue in the position that had been conferred on him by Caesar. Antipater was poisoned by a rival, but his sons Herod and Phasaelus repressed and extinguished all opposition. When the battle of Philippi placed the Roman world in the hands of Antony and Octavius, Antony obtained Asia. Herod and Phasaelus were then named Tetrarchs of Judea.

Later Antony became entrenched in the labors of Cleopatra. The Parthians entered the land in support of the rival Maccabean prince Antigonus, the son of Aristobulus. By treachery, Phasaelus and Hyrcanus were induced to go to the Parthian camp, and while there they were taken captives. Shortly thereafter, Phasaelus destroyed himself while in prison, while Hyrcanus was deprived of his ears, to make him unfit for the office of High Priest. For a very brief time, the Maccabean prince Antigonus succeeded both to the High Priesthood and royalty in Jerusalem. Meantime Herod had been able to make his escape from Jerusalem. He left his family to the defense of his brother Joseph, in the inaccessible fortress of Masada. He fled into Arabia, and finally made his way to Rome. While he was in Rome he succeeded in his ambitions, with the consent of Antony and Octavius, and was proclaimed by the Roman Senate King of Judea.

Yet he was still left with the task of conquering his kingdom. At first he made some headway with the help of the Romans. Any success that he had gained was more than lost, however, during his brief absence on a visit to Antony. While he was away, his brother Joseph was defeated and killed, and Galilee which had been subdued for a brief time, revolted once again. After returning from his visit to Antony, the Romans rendered him aid and his losses were more than retrieved during the battles. Soon all Palestine, with the exception of Jerusalem, was in his hands.

While laying siege to Jerusalem, he went to Samaria to marry the beautiful Maccabean princess Mariamne who had been betrothed to him five years before. That ill-fated queen as well as her elder brother Aristobulus, united in themselves the two rival branches of the Maccabean family. Their father's name was Alexander who was the son of Aristobulus, and brother of that Antigonus whom Herod now besieged in Jerusalem; and their mother, Alexandra was the daughter of Hyrcanus II. Their uncle, Antigonus, wasn't able to hold out against the combined forces of Rome and Herod, and the carnage was terrible. When Herod, by rich presents, at length induced the Romans to leave Jerusalem, they took Antigonus with them. By the desire of Herod, he was later executed.

This was the first of the Maccabees who fell victim to Herod's jealousy and cruelty. The next to experience his vengeance were the principal adherents of his rival Antigonus, who were in Jerusalem. Forty-five of the noblest and richest were executed

upon his command. His next step was to appoint an obscure Babylonian to the High Priesthood. This awakened the active hostility of Alexandra, the mother of Mariamne who was wife to Herod. The Maccabean princess claimed the High Priesthood for her son Aristobulus. Her intrigues with Cleopatra -- and through her with Antony -- and the entreaties of Mariamne, the only woman Herod ever truly loved though in his own mad way, prevailed.

At the age of 17 Aristobulus was made High Priest. But Herod, who knew quite well the hatred and contempt of the Maccabean members of his family, had his mother-in-law (Alexandra) watched. This precaution increased after the vain attempt of Alexandra to have herself and her son removed in coffins from Jerusalem, to flee to Cleopatra. Soon the jealousy and suspicions of Herod were raised to murderous madness, by the acclamations which greeted the young Aristobulus at the Feast of Tabernacles. Herod considered Aristobulus to be a dangerous Maccabean rival, and one who needed to be gotten rid of. So by secret order of Herod, Aristobulus was drowned while bathing. His mother (Alexandra) denounced Herod as a murderer, and her influence with Cleopatra (who also hated Herod) led to Herod's being summoned before Antony. Once more, bribery prevailed, but soon other problems awaited Herod.

When obeying the summons of Antony, Herod had committed the government to his uncle Joseph, who was also his brother-in-law (Joseph had married Salome, the sister of Herod). Herod's mad jealousy had prompted him to direct that, in case he was condemned by Rome, Mariamne was to be killed so that she could not become the wife of another. Unfortunately, Joseph told Mariamne about Herod's directive to show her how much she was loved by Herod. On the return of Herod, the infamous Salome accused her old husband of impropriety with Mariamne. When Herod discovered from Salome that Joseph had told the Queen (Mariamne) of his commission to kill her, he regarded it as confirming his sister's charge of impropriety, and ordered Joseph to be executed without even a hearing.

External complications now supervened. Herod had to cede to Cleopatra the districts of Phoenicia and Philistia, and that of Jericho with its rich balsam plantations. Then the dissensions between Antony and Octavius involved him in the cause of Antony in a war with Arabia, whose king had failed to pay tribute to Cleopatra. Although Herod was victorious, he now had to reckon with another master (Octavius). Antony was killed in the battle of Actium, and Herod had to now make his peace with Octavius.

He was able to do service to the new cause, presenting himself before Augustus. But, in order to be secure from all rivals, he had the aged Hyrcanus II executed on the pretense of intrigues with Arabia. Herod was successful with Augustus; and when, in the following summer, Herod furnished Augustus with supplies on his march to Egypt, Herod was rewarded by a substantial addition of territory.

When he was about to appear before Augustus, Herod had entrusted to Soemus the charge of Mariamne--Soemus was given the same fatal directions as had been previously given to Joseph. Once again Mariamne found out about it, and once again the old suspicions were raised--this time by not only Salome (Herod's sister) but also by Kypros (Herod's mother). Again Herod imagined he had found corroborative evidence of the guilt of Mariamne. Soemus was killed without a hearing, and the beautiful Mariamne was executed after a mock trial. After the execution of Mariamne, the tyrant was

enslaved with remorse, passion, and longing for his murdered wife which brought him to the brink of the grave. Alexandra (the mother of Mariamne) deemed the moment favorable for her plots -- but she was discovered and executed also. Of the Maccabean family there now remained only distant members, the sons of Babas, who had found asylum with Costobarus, the Governor of Idumea, who had wedded Salome after the death of Joseph. Salome became as tired of him as she had been of Joseph, and she denounced Costobarus as well as the sons of Babas who also fell victims to Herod. The family of the Maccabees thus perished.

The hand of the maddened tyrant was next turned against his own family. Of his ten wives, we will mention only those whose children occupy a place in this history. The son of Doris (an Idumean) was Antipater; the sons of Mariamne (a Maccabean) were Alexander and Aristobulus; the son of another Mariamne (whose father Herod had made High Priest) was Herod (a name shared by other sons); the sons of Malthake (a Samaritan) were Archelaus and Herod Antipas, and finally the son of Cleopatra (of Jerusalem) was Philip. The sons (Alexander and Aristobulus) of the Maccabean princess (Mariamne) were sent to Rome for their education because they were the presumptive heirs. On this occasion Herod received, as reward for many services, the country east of the Jordan, and was allowed to appoint his still remaining brother Pheroras as Tetrarch of Perea. On their return from Rome Alexander and Aristobulus were married -- Alexander to a daughter of the king of Cappadocia, and Aristobulus to his cousin Bernice, the daughter of Salome (Herod's sister). Neither kinship, nor the nearer relationship of son-in-law in which Aristobulus now stood to Salome could extinguish the hatred of Salome towards the dead Maccabean princess or her children. Nor did Alexander and Aristobulus, in their pride of descent, disguise their feelings towards the house of their father. At first, Herod did not heed the denunciations of his sister. Yet it was not long before he did yield to vague apprehensions.

He first recalled Antipater (the son of Doris) from exile, and sent him to Rome for education. The breach in the family was soon opened, and Herod took Alexander and Aristobulus to Italy to lay formal accusations against them before Augustus. Through the wise counsels of the Emperor, peace was restored for a short time. Antipater returned to Palestine and joined his false accusations to those of Salome. Once again the king of Cappadocia succeeded in reconciling Herod and his sons (Alexander and Aristobulus). Yet in the end, the intrigues of Salome, Antipater, and an infamous foreigner prevailed -- Alexander and Aristobulus were imprisoned, and an accusation of high treason was laid against them before the Emperor. Augustus gave Herod full powers, but advised the convocation of a mixed tribunal of Jews and Romans to try the case. The two princes were condemned to death, and when some old soldiers ventured to intercede for them, 300 of the supposed adherents of the cause were cut down--Alexander and Aristobulus were strangled in prison. All these events happened in Samaria where, thirty years before, Herod had married their mother, Mariamne.

Antipater (the son of Doris the Idumean) now became the heir presumptive. But, impatient of the throne, he plotted with Herod's brother, Pheroras, against his father. Once again, Salome denounced her nephew and her brother. Antipater withdrew to Rome, and after the death of Pheroras, Herod obtained indisputable evidence that his son had plotted against his life, he lured Antipater to Palestine, where on his arrival he was

cast into prison. All that was needed was the permission of Augustus for his execution. It arrived, and was carried out only five days before the death of Herod himself. With the death of Herod the Great ended a reign almost unparalleled for its reckless cruelty and bloodshed. The murder of the Innocents in Bethlehem (which we will be studying soon) was only a trifling episode among the many atrocities of Herod the Great; therefore, the murder of the Innocents in Bethlehem was not seen as of substantial importance to be recorded in the historical records of Jewish history.

From all that has been said, we can understand the feelings of the people towards such a king. They hated the Idumean; they detested his semi-heathen reign; and they abhorred his deeds of cruelty. The King had surrounded himself with foreign counselors, and was protected by foreign mercenaries from Thracia, Germany, and Gaul. For as long as he lived, no woman's honor was safe, no man's life was secure. An army of all-powerful spies pervaded Jerusalem under the command of Herod. Torture would extract any confession from the most innocent.

What his relationship to Judaism has been may easily be inferred. He would be a Jew. He would even build the temple and advocate the cause of Jews in other lands, and in a certain sense he would even conform to the Law of Judaism. In building the Temple, he was so anxious to conciliate national prejudice, that the Sanctuary itself was entrusted to the workmanship of priests only. Neither did he ever intrude into the Holy Place, nor interfere with any of the functions of priesthood. None of his coins bore symbols which would have shocked popular feeling, nor did any of the buildings erected in Jerusalem exhibit any forbidden emblems. The Sanhedrin did exist during his reign, though it must have been shorn of any real power, and its activity confined to ecclesiastical, or semi-ecclesiastical, causes. The strangest thing of all is that he seems to have had at least the passive support of two of the greatest Rabbis--the Pollio and Sameas of Josephus' Antiquities.

It was also under the government of Herod the Great that Hillel and Shammai lived and taught in Jerusalem. Tradition designates both as "the fathers of old". Both gave their names to "schools", whose direction was generally different chiefly for the sake of opposition. Hillel was consistently the most liberal and mild of the two. The teachings of both was supposed to have been declared by the "Voice from Heaven" as the "words of the living God." The Law however was to be henceforth according to the teaching of Hillel. In his extreme old age and near his end, he may have presided over that meeting of the Sanhedrin which, in answer to Herod's inquiry, pointed to Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah. We think of him also as the grandfather of that Gamaliel at whose feet Saul of Tarsus sat. To us he represents the idea of a Jewish reformer.

So in Jerusalem there were two worlds sitting side by side: On one side was Grecianism with its theater and amphitheater and with foreigners filling the court and crowding the city--foreign tendencies and ways from the foreign King downward. On the other side was the old Jewish world, becoming now set and ossified in the Schools of Hillel and Shammai, and overshadowed by the Temple and Synagogue. Each pursued its own course by the side of the other. If Herod had everywhere his spies, the Jewish law provided its two police magistrates in Jerusalem, the only judges who received any pay for their services. If Herod judged cruelly and despotically, the Sanhedrin weighed most deliberately, the balance always inclining to mercy. If Greek was the language of the

court and spoken by the majority in the land, the language of the people which was spoken also by Christ and His Apostles was a dialect of the ancient Hebrew, the Western or Palestinian Aramaic. The language of the temple and the synagogue was Hebrew, and the addresses of the Rabbis had to be “targumed” (or translated) into the vernacular Aramean.

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n. THE VISIT OF THE MAGI
Matthew 2:1-12

1. Read Matthew 2:1-12 through in its entirety one time.
2. Read Matthew 2:1
(1) No references
3. Read Matthew 2:2
(1) Numbers 24:17

Matthew 2:1-2

- 1 When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem,
- 2 saying, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.”

The adoration of the Magi, like the other narratives in this chapter, has no parallel in any other first-century Christian writing. Therefore, there is no way of ascertaining whether it has been embellished, or indeed, whether it “happened” at all as a matter of literal facts. The value and importance of the narrative do not depend, however, on its accuracy; the story is rather to be thought of as a work of art, which the evangelist presents to the Christ child as his offering. Christians who hear it read during the Christmas or Epiphany season instinctively recognize its value, regardless of the question of fact. It expresses the truth that men have been brought from far and by many ways to worship Christ. It also breathes the sense of wonder and thanksgiving that through the birth of this child, and his subsequent life, death, and resurrection, the world has been redeemed. Matthew and his contemporaries felt that even nature itself could not be unmoved in the presence of such a stupendous event. (IB)

Verse 1:

When Jesus was born -- Matthew does not give biographic details of the supernatural birth of Jesus. His main purpose is to show the reception given by the world to the new-born Messianic king. Homage from afar, and hostility at home. These foreshadow the fortunes of new faith: reception by the Gentiles, and rejection by the Jews. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

in Bethlehem of Judea -- There was also a Bethlehem in Galilee which was seven

miles northwest of Nazareth according to Josephus (Antiquities. Book XIX. 15). This Bethlehem of Judea (the name means house of bread) mentioned in this verse was the scene of Ruth's life with Boaz (Ruth 1:1; Matthew 1:5) and the home of David, descendant of Ruth and ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). David was born here, and it was here that he was anointed by Samuel (I Samuel 17:12). The town came to be called the city of David (Luke 2:11). Jesus, who was born in this house of bread called himself the Bread of Life (John 6:35), the true Manna from heaven. Matthew either assumes the knowledge of the details of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem which are given in Luke 2:1-7, or he did not consider them germane to his purpose. Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem from Nazareth because it was the original family home for Joseph (and possibly Mary also). The first enrollment by the Emperor Augustus was by families. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Bethlehem is five miles south of Jerusalem, and a church there marks the traditional site of Jesus' birth. (IB)

[in the days of Herod](#) -- This is the only date for the birth of Christ given by Matthew. Luke gives a more precise date in his Gospel (Luke 2:1-3) as the time of the first enrollment by Augustus, and while Cyrenius was ruler of Syria. We know from Matthew that Jesus was born while Herod the Great was king. Josephus speaks plainly of Herod's death in 4 B.C. He was first Governor of Galilee, but had been made king of Judea by Antony and Octavius in 40 B.C. He was great in sin and cruelty, and won the favor of the emperor Augustus. The story in Josephus (Antiquities) is one of tragedy. It is not made plain by Matthew how long it was before the death of Herod that Jesus was born. Our traditional date of 1 A.D. is certainly wrong as Matthew shows. It seems plain that the birth of Jesus cannot be put later than 5 B.C. The data that is supplied by Luke would make it around 6 or 7 B.C. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Herod the Great was made king of the Jews by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C., and he gained control of his realm a few years later. He died in 4 B.C. (IB)

Herod reigned from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C. The [magi](#) were originally a designation for the Persian priestly caste. Later, the word became used of those who were regarded as having more than human knowledge, such as magicians. Matthew's magi are astrologers. (NAB)

One of the rare chronological pieces of information in Matthew places this event in the time of Herod the Great, a satellite king of Judea (37-4 B.C.). It is impossible to date the year of the birth of Jesus exactly; according to the calculations of Dionysius Exiguus, Herod the Great died four years before Jesus was born. (JBC)

[wise men from the east](#) -- The etymology of [magi](#) is quite uncertain. It may come from the same Indo-European root as *magnus*, though some find it of Babylonian origin. Herodotus speaks of a tribe of Magi among the Medians. Among the Persians (now the country of Iraq) there was a priestly caste of Magi like the Chaldeans in Babylon (located in Iraq) (Daniel 1:4). Daniel was head of such an order (Daniel 2:48). It is the same word as our "magician" and it sometimes carried that idea as in the case of Simon Magnus (Acts 8:9, 11). But here in Matthew the idea seems to be rather that of astrologers. Babylon (in Iraq) was the home of astrology, but we only know that the men were from the east whether Arabia, Babylon, Persia, or elsewhere. The notion that they were kings arose from an interpretation of Isaiah 60:3 and Revelation 21:24. The idea

that they were three in number is due to the mention of three kinds of gifts (gold, frankincense, and myrrh), but that is no proof at all. Legend has added to the story that their names were Caspar, Balthasar and Melchior as in Ben Hur and also that they represented three sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. A casket in the Cologne Cathedral is actually supposed to contain the skulls of the three Magi. The word for east means “from the risings” of the sun. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The visitors are called *magoi* (Latin, magi). It is probably used in a loose sense. Originally the term designated the learned priestly caste of the Persians; later it came to mean any one skilled in occult knowledge and power (much the same as our term “magician”, which is derived from the same word). It could also mean a charlatan. Matthew certainly does not use the word in an abusive sense. The mention of the “star” shows that they are called *magoi* because of their knowledge of astrology. Nothing else is said about them. From the east suggests Mesopotamia, the home of astrology in the Hellenistic world. The story reflects the popular belief that each person is represented by a star, which appears at his birth. (JBC)

The Magi seem originally to have been a Median tribe of priests; later the word refers to the Zoroastrian priestly caste. An embassy of Parthian magi paid homage to Nero at Naples in 66 A.D. and returned home by another route. The word Magi also denotes astrologers and magicians generally. The NT and the rabbis usually employ the word in an evil sense, but Matthew probably thinks of Babylonian astrologers. (IB)

Verse 2:

we saw his star at its rising -- This does not mean that they saw the star which was in the east as some versions indicate. This would make them go east to follow it instead of west from the east. The words “in the east” are probably to be taken with “we saw”; that is, we were in the east when we saw it, or still more probably “we saw his star at its rising” or “when it rose.” The Magi ask where is the one born king of the Jews. They claim that they have seen his star, either a miracle, a combination of bright stars, or a comet. These men may have been Jewish proselytes, and may have known of the Messianic hope, for even Vergil had caught a vision of it. The whole world was on tiptoe of expectancy for something. There was a Magian belief that a star could be the counterpart, or angel, of a great man. They came to worship the newly born king. Seneca tells of Magians who came to Athens with sacrifices to Plato after his death. They had their own way of concluding that the star which they had seen pointed to the birth of this Messianic king. Cicero refers to the constellation from which, on the birthnight of Alexander, Magians foretold that the destroyer of Asia was born. Another scholar is positive that no miracle was intended by the report of the Magi or by Matthew in his narrative. But one must be allowed to say that the birth of Jesus, if really God’s only Son who has become incarnate, is the greatest of all miracles. Even the methods of astrologers need not disturb those who are sure of this fact. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

It was a common ancient belief that a new star appeared at the time of a ruler’s birth. Matthew also draws upon the OT story of Balaam, who had prophesied that “A star shall advance from Jacob” (Numbers 24:17), though there the star means not an astral phenomenon but the king himself. (NAB)

His star: It is impossible to identify a particular heavenly body as the star of Bethlehem; any attempt to do so would be futile. Although the allusion is not explicit,

the Jewish reader would recognize the star that rises from Jacob (Numbers 24:17)--which is an allusion to David and is usually interpreted in a messianic sense. The story of the Magi, like the genealogy of Jesus, affirms that Jesus is king Messiah. The Magi seek a king, and Herod consults the religious experts of Judaism to find out where they should look. Of this there is no doubt; they should look not in Jerusalem but in Bethlehem.

(JBC)

The Magi believed that a star could be the counterpart, or angel, of a great man. Jews often identified the star out of Jacob (Numbers 24:17) with the Messiah. Closer parallels are found in pagan antiquity and in the late Jewish stories that stars announced the births of Isaac and Moses. The story meant to Ignatius that all magic had been overthrown by the birth of Christ. Matthew may draw this contrast: the Gentiles worship him, while Herod seeks to kill him. We cannot identify the star, though attempts to do so have been made. Jupiter and Saturn were in close conjunction three times in 7 B.C., and Halley's comet passed over the orbital point of that body when it was closest to the sun on October 8, 12 B.C. The words "in the east" might be translated as the rising of a star that occurred at the same time as the rising of the sun; that is, its first appearance in the east at the time of sunrise. Worship may mean to Matthew divine worship, or the homage paid by an Oriental king. (IB)

Summary from LToJC:

The oldest tradition traces the Magi to Arabia. There existed at that time the closest intercourse between Palestine and Arabia, and from about 120 B.C. to the sixth century A.D., the kings of Yemen professed the Jewish faith. If, on the one hand, the Eastern Magi would spontaneously connect a celestial phenomenon with the birth of a Jewish king, evidence will later present itself to connect the meaning attached to the appearance of "the star" at that particular time with Jewish expectancy of the Messiah.

Shortly after the presentation of the Infant Savior in the Temple, certain Magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem with strange tidings. They had seen at its "rising" the motion of the star's appearance, which they regarded as signaling the birth of the Messiah King of the Jews. Accordingly they had come to Jerusalem to pay homage to Him, probably not because they thought he had been born in the Jewish capital, but because they would naturally expect that in Jerusalem they would be able to obtain authentic information of where he might be found. In the simplicity of their hearts, the Magi addressed themselves to the official head of the nation. The rumor of such an inquiry by such persons, would rapidly spread throughout the city. But it produced on King Herod, and in the capital, a far different impression from that of the Magi. Unscrupulously cruel as Herod had already proven to be, even the slightest suspicion of danger to his rule--the bare possibility of the Advent of one, who had such claims upon the allegiance of Israel, and who, if acknowledged, would evoke the most intense movement on their part--must have struck terror in his heart. Even the thought of a pretender, with such claims, would fill him with suspicion, apprehension, and impotent rage.

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4. Read Matthew 2:3-5

(1) No references

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5. Read Matthew 2:6

(1) Micah 5:1

(2) I Samuel 5:2

Matthew 2:3-6

- 3 When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.
4 Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.
5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet:
6 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Verse 3:

[was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him](#) -- Those familiar with the story of Herod the Great as told in Josephus can well understand the meaning of these words. Herod in his rage over his family rivalries and jealousies put to death the two sons of Mariamne (Alexander and Aristobulus), Mariamne herself, and Antipater, another son and once his heir, besides the brother and mother of Mariamne (Aristobulus and Alexandra) and her grandfather, John Hyrcanus. He had made will after will and was now in a fatal illness and in fury over the question of the Magi. He showed his excitement and the whole city was upset because the people knew only too well what he could do when in a rage over the disturbance of his plans. The foreign Idumean and usurper feared a rival, and the tyrant feared the rival would be welcome. Herod as a hated Idumean. (Internet -- Crosswalk site)

Verse 4:

[he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born](#) -- The very words of Herod retained by Matthew's report are given. The tense of this phrase suggests that Herod repeatedly inquired, probably of one and another of the leaders gathered together, both Sadducees (chief priests) and Pharisees (scribes). To some scholars it is doubtful if Herod called together all the Sanhedrin, because he had begun his reign with a massacre of the Sanhedrin (Josephus. Antiquities. Book XIV. 4). But that had been thirty years ago, and Herod was desperately in earnest to learn what the Jews really expected about the coming of "the Messiah." Still Herod probably got together not the Sanhedrin since "elders" are not mentioned, but leaders among the chief priests and scribes, not a formal meeting, but a free assembly for conference. He had evidently heard of this expected king and he would swallow plenty of pride to be able to compass the defeat of these hopes. Furthermore, he could easily ask the question of a single scribe. (Internet -- Crosswalk site)

The chief priests were probably members of the families from which the high priests were at that time appointed. The scribes were experts in the religious law. The term "scribe" may include both those scholars who were members of the Sanhedrin and

their pupils. A scribe was ordained, probably by his teacher, with the laying on of hands. About this time the honorific title “rabbi” which means “my great one” began to be given to the scribes. A scribe could act as a judge in criminal cases and decide civil cases as they arose. The Sanhedrin of Jerusalem--which was the religious and also the civil and criminal supreme court--seems to have been made up of the chief priests, scribes, and perhaps also the “elders” or heads of influential families (Luke 22:66). Herod would not have convened this entire assembly to inquire where the Messiah was to be born. He might have consulted a few of its members. (IB)

Verse 5:

[They said to him](#) -- Whether the religious experts had to search their scriptures or not they give the answer that is in accord with the common Jewish opinion that the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem, and of the seed of David (John 7:42). So they quote Michah 5:2 as a free paraphrase. It is not precisely like the Hebrew text nor like the Septuagint. He has consulted the experts and now he has their answer -- Bethlehem of Judah. The common form used in quoting scripture was the phrase: “It stands written.” (Internet -- Crosswalk site)

[to shepherd](#) -- Some versions use “shall rule” instead of “shepherd.” Shepherd is the correct word. Homer calls kings the shepherd-people. In Hebrews 13:20 Jesus is called “the great shepherd of the sheep”. Jesus calls himself “the good shepherd” (John 10:11). Peter calls Christ “the chief shepherd” (I Peter 2:25). Jesus told Peter to “shepherd” the lambs (John 21:16). Our word pastor means shepherd. (Internet-- Crosswalk site).

[in Bethlehem of Judah](#) -- The place of David’s birth and the place of origin of the king Messiah of the future. In support of this, the text of Micah 5:1-3 is cited. The text is cited neither according to the LXX nor according to the MT; it is conflated with the text of II Samuel 5:2 (the offer of kingship made to David by the elders of Israel). (JBC)

Some scholars believe that OT prophecy is the sole source of the tradition that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. (IB)

Summary from LToJC:

It is not difficult to understand that the whole city should have shared the trouble of the king. The people of Jerusalem had cause to fear. They knew only too well the character of Herod, and what the consequences would be to them, or to any one who might be suspected, however unjustly, of sympathy with any claimant to the royal throne of David.

Herod took immediate measures which was characteristic of his usual cunning. He called together all the High Priests -- past and present -- and all the learned Rabbis, and without committing himself as to whether the Messiah was already born, or only expected, simply questioned them concerning His birthplace. This would show him where Jewish expectancy looked for the appearance of his rival, and thus enable him to watch the place and the people generally, while it might possibly bring to light the feelings of the leaders of Israel. At the same time he took care diligently to inquire about the precise time, when the unusual appearance had first attracted the attention of the Magi. This would enable him to judge, how far back he would have to make his own inquiries, since the birth of the Pretender might be made to synchronize with the earliest

appearance of the star. As long as any one lived who was born in Bethlehem between the earliest appearance of this star and the time of the arrival of the Magi was not safe. The subsequent conduct of Herod shows that the Magi must have told him that their earliest observation of the appearance had taken place two years before their arrival in Jerusalem (Matthew 2:16).

The assembled authorities of Israel could only return one answer to the question submitted by Herod. As shown by the rendering of the Targum Jonathan, the prediction in Micah 5:2 was at the time universally understood as pointing to Bethlehem, as the birthplace of the Messiah. Matthew reproduces the prophetic utterance of Micah, exactly as such quotations were popularly made at that time. We need to remember that Hebrew was a dead language as far as the people were concerned. The Holy Scriptures were always translated into the popular dialect by the interpreter. During the age in which Matthew was written, these renderings of the biblical text were not allowed to be written down. This formed the basis for the later Targum (interpretations of Holy Scripture). At that time each person targumed for himself, and these were neither literal versions, nor paraphrases, but something between them, a sort of interpreting translation. Such Targuming of the Old Testament was entirely in accordance with the then universal method of setting Holy Scripture before a popular audience.

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6. Read Matthew 2:7-8
- (1) No references

Matthew 2:7-8

- 7 Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance.
- 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage."

Verse 7:

[Then Herod called the magi secretly](#) -- He had manifestly not told members of the Sanhedrin why he was concerned about the Messiah. So he conceals his motives to the Magi. He was anxious to see if the Jewish prophecy of the birthplace of the Messiah agreed with the indications of the star to the Magi. He kept to himself his purpose. The time of the appearing star is not "the time when the star appeared" but the age of the star's appearance. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 8:

[sent them to Bethlehem and said](#) -- They were to search out accurately concerning the child, and then bring Herod word that he might also come and worship him. The deceit of Herod seemed plausible enough and might have succeeded if not for God's intervention to protect His Son from the jealous rage of Herod (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[the time of the star's appearance](#) -- The inquiry about the time looks to the sequel in verses 13-23. No guidance of the star is suggested for the journey prior to the arrival

of the Magi in Jerusalem; but now it leads them not only to the town but to the very house. (JBC)

The time of the star's appearance would have been important to astrology, and also would enable Herod to determine the age of the child. (IB)

Summary from LToJC:

The further conduct of Herod was in keeping with his plans. He secretly sent for the Magi. After ascertaining the precise time when they had first observed the star, he directed them to Bethlehem with the request to inform him when they had found the Child on the pretense that he was equally desirous of paying him homage.

As they left Jerusalem to continue their pilgrimage, to their surprise and joy the same star once more appeared on the horizon and seemed to move before them until it stood over where the young child was, that is, not over any particular house, but over Bethlehem. Since in ancient times such extraordinary guidance by a star was a matter of belief and expectancy, the Magi would regard it as the fullest confirmation that they had been accurately directed to Bethlehem--and they rejoiced. It probably would not have been difficult to learn where, in Bethlehem, the child might be found.

It appears that the temporary abode of the stable (or cave) had been exchanged by the Holy Family for the more permanent abode of a house, and there the Magi found the Savior with his Mother. The scene of the Magi's visit is best realized not by description, but by silently joining in the silent homage and the silent offerings of these men from the east.

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7. Read Matthew 2:9-10
(1) No references

8. Read Matthew 2:11
(1) Psalm 72:10-11 and 15 (2) Isaiah 60:6

Matthew 2:9-11

- 9 After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was.
- 10 They were overjoyed at seeing the star,
- 11 and entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves, and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Verse 9:

[preceded them](#) -- Not as a guide to the town since they now knew that, but to the place where the child was.

It is not certain how Matthew visualized this sign. (IB)

Verse 10:

Their joy was due to the success of their search.

Verse 11:

Here “treasures” means “caskets”-- a receptacle for valuables. To the ancient writers, it meant “treasury”. It means the things laid up in store in Matthew 6:20. In their “caskets” the Magi brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh, all of which were found at that time in Arabia, although gold was found in Babylon and elsewhere. (Internet -- Crosswalk site)

The OT texts of Psalm 72:10; Psalm 72:15 and Isaiah 60:6 have led to the interpretation of the Magi as Kings. (NAB)

The gifts that the Magi bring echo Psalm 72:10 and Isaiah 60:6. (JBC)

Matthew no doubt thinks of Isaiah 60:6, where “they from Sheba”, that is, south Arabia, bring gold and incense. In Psalm 72:10, the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. There is no intentional symbolism. Gold and fragrant resins were used in worship, perfume, medicine and embalming, and would be considered appropriate gifts for a monarch. (IB)

Summary from IB:

The hymn “We three kings of Orient are” gives the details with which legend has adorned this well-loved story. Gold, brought by Caspar, can represent our gifts of substance. Melchoir brought frankincense which, because of its fragrance, can represent our inner treasure of thought and influence. The wise men were the scientists of that age.

Is science safe unless it becomes worship? The music that most entralls is essentially religious, and our greatest architecture is a prayer in stone. So scientific knowledge must be dedicate. Our keenest thought, even that concerned only for “the truth,” easily becomes a pride or threat. Thought is worthy only when it is marked by reverence. Balthazar brought myrrh. Myrrh was a precious gift fit for the king. Since it was used in embalming, it symbolizes our own sorrow and suffering. The reason why sorrow hardens one person and melts another is just that the one keeps the sorrow selfishly while the other offers it in oblation.

It is worth noting that all three brought the best gifts they had to offer -- the utmost for the highest.

* * * * *

9. Read Matthew 2:12

Matthew 2:12

12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

warned in a dream -- In this case the meaning of warned is “to transact business,” and “to consult, to deliberate, to make answer as of magistrates or oracles, to instruct, to admonish.” In the LXX and in the NT it occurs with the idea of being warned by God. (Internet -- Crosswalk site)

SESSION 9

Overview from LToJC:

The stay of the Holy Family in Egypt must have been one of short duration. During the entire latter part of his life, Herod's dread of a rival to the throne had haunted him, and he had sacrificed thousands, among them were those who were nearest and dearest to him. Still the tyrant was not at rest. A more terrible scene is not presented in history than that of the closing days of Herod. He was tormented by nameless fears; and he was forever a prey to his own vain remorse when he would call out passionately for his loved murdered wife Mariamne, and her sons. He even made attempts on his own life. It was the delirium of tyranny, and his passion for bloodshed that drove him to the verge of madness. The most loathsome of diseases had fastened onto his body, and his sufferings were at times agonizing. Upon the advice of his physicians, he was carried to the baths at Callirhoe (east of the Jordan) in an attempt to seek all remedies with the determination of one who will do hard battle with life. The namelessly horrible distemper, which had seized the old man of seventy, held him fast in its grasp, and played death on the living. He knew it was the end, and had himself carried back to his palace under the palm-trees of Jericho. They had known it also in Jerusalem, and even before the last stage of his disease, two of the most honored and loved Rabbis -- Judas and Matthias--had headed the wild band which would sweep away all traces of Herod's idolatrous rule. They began by pulling down the immense golden eagle, which had been hung over the great gate of the temple. The two ringleaders, and forty of their followers, allowed themselves to be taken by Herod's guards. A mock public trial in the theater at Jericho followed. Herod, carried out on a couch, was both accuser and judge. The zealots, who had made noble answer to the tyrant, were burnt alive; and the High Priest who was suspected of connivance, was deposed.

After that the end came rapidly. On his return from Callirhoe, feeling his death approaching, the King had summoned the noblest of Israel throughout the land of Jericho, and shut them up in the Hippodrome, with orders to his sister to have them slain immediately upon his death, in the grim hope that the joy of the people at his death would be changed into mourning. Five days before his death one ray of passing joy lit his couch. It was caused by a letter from Augustus allowing Herod to execute his son Antipater--the false accuser and real murderer of his half-brothers Alexander and Aristobulus. The death of the wretched prince was hastened by his attempt to bribe the jailer, as the noise in the palace, caused by the attempted suicide of Herod, led him to suppose his father was actually dead. The fresh access of rage shortened the life that was already running out. Five days more, and the terror of Judea lay dead. He had reigned for thirty-seven years; thirty-four since his conquest of Jerusalem. Soon the rule for which he had so long plotted, striven, and stained himself with untold crimes, passed from his descendants. A century more, and the entire race of Herod was wiped away.

We pass by the empty pageant and barbaric splendor of his burying in the castle of Herodium, close to Bethlehem. The events of the last few weeks formed a lurid background to the murder of the Innocents. The visit of the Magi took place in February. On the 12th of March, the Rabbis and their adherents were slain. On the following early morning there was a lunar eclipse. The execution of Antipater preceded the death of his father by five days, and Herod's death occurred from seven to fourteen days before the

Passover, which took place on April 12th.

Salome (Herod's sister) and her husband were too wise to execute Herod's direction in regard to the noble Jews that were shut up in the Hippodrome. Their liberation and the death of Herod were marked by the leaders of the people as joyous events. Thereafter, in commemoration of these events, a Feast Day was established which was called Yom Tobh on which there was no mourning allowed.

Herod had changed his last will and testament three times before his death. By the first will Antipater (the successful murderer of Alexander and Aristobulus) had been appointed his successor, while the latter two were named kings, though of what districts is not known. After the execution of the two sons of Mariamne, Antipater was named king, and, in case of his death, Herod, the son of Mariamne II. When the treachery of Antipater was proven, Herod made a third will in which Herod Antipas (the one of the Gospels) was named his successor. But a few days before his death, Herod the Great made yet another disposition, by which Archelaus (the elder brother of Herod Antipas, and both sons of Malthake, the Samaritan) was appointed king--Antipas tetrarch of Galilee and Perea; and Philip (the son of Cleopatra of Jerusalem), tetrarch of the territory east of the Jordan. These testaments reflected the varying phases of suspicion and family-hatred through which Herod had passed. Although the Emperor seems to have authorized him to appoint his successor, Herod wisely made his disposition dependent on the approval of Augustus. Archelaus had been immediately proclaimed king by the army; but he prudently declined the title until the Emperor confirmed it. The night of his father's death, and those that followed, were characteristically spent by Archelaus in rioting with his friends. But the people of Jerusalem was not easily satisfied. At first liberal promises of amnesty and reforms had silenced the population. But the indignation excited by the late murder of the Rabbis soon burst into a storm of lamentation, and then rebellion which Archelaus silenced by the slaughter of not less than three thousand, and that within the sacred precincts of the Temple itself.

There were other and more serious difficulties that awaited him in Rome. He went there in company with his mother, his aunt Salome, and other relatives. These presently deserted him to espouse the claims of Antipas, who likewise appeared before Augustus to plead for the royal succession, assigned to him in a former testament. The Herodian family, while intriguing and clamoring each on his own account, were agreed that they would rather not have a king at all, but that that they be placed under the suzerainty of Rome. Although if a king there must be, they preferred Antipus to Archelaus. Meanwhile, fresh troubles broke out in Palestine, which were suppressed by fire, sword, and crucifixions. And now two other deputations arrived in the Imperial City. Philip (the step-brother of Archelaus) to whom Archelaus had left the administration of his kingdom, came to look after his own interests, as well as to support Archelaus. At the same time, a Jewish deputation of fifty, from Palestine, accompanied by eight thousand Roman Jews, clamored for the disposition of the entire Herodian race, on account of their crimes, and the incorporation of Palestine with Syria--no doubt in hope of the same semi-independence under their own authorities that was enjoyed by their fellow-religionists in the Grecian cities. Augustus decided to confirm the last testament of Herod, with slight modifications, of which the most important was that Archelaus would bear the title of Ethnarch, which would eventually be changed to king if

he so desired that position. His dominions were to be Judea, Idumea, and Samaria, with a revenue of 600 talents (equal to about 230,000 or 240,000 pounds). Archelaus began his rule by crushing all resistance with his wholesale slaughter of his opponents. Of the High Priest's office he disposed after the manner of his father. He far surpassed Herod the Great in his cruelty, oppression, luxury, the grossest egotism, and the lowest sensuality--and these without having the talent nor the energy of Herod. His brief reign ceased in 6 A.D. when the Emperor banished him to Gaul on account of his crimes.

It must have been soon after the accession of Archelaus, but before the tidings actually reached Joseph that the Holy Family returned to Palestine. The first intention of Joseph seems to have been to settle in Bethlehem, where they had lived since the birth of Jesus. Obvious reasons would incline him to choose this place as his residence, and to avoid Nazareth. His trade, even had he been unknown in Bethlehem, would have easily supplied the modest wants of his household. But when he reached Palestine and learned who the successor of Herod was, and in what manner he had been inaugurated, common prudence would have dictated the withdrawal of the Savior from the domains of Archelaus. But it needed Divine direction to determine his return to Nazareth.

Of the many years spent in Nazareth, during which Jesus passed from infancy to childhood, from childhood to youth, and from youth to adulthood, sacred scripture has left us only the briefest report.

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o. THE FLIGHT TO EGYPT
Matthew 2:13-15

1. Read Matthew 2:13-14
(1) No references
2. Read Matthew 2:15
(1) Hosea 11:1

Matthew 2:13-15

- 13 When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him."
- 14 Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt.
- 15 He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Verses 13-23:

Biblical and non biblical traditions about Moses are applied here to the child Jesus, although the dominant OT type is not Moses, but rather Israel (Matthew 2:15).
(NAB)

Verse 13:

flee to Egypt -- Egypt was a traditional place of refuge for those fleeing from danger in Palestine (I Kings 11:40; Jeremiah 26:21), but the main reason why the child is

to be taken to Egypt is that he may relive the Exodus experience of Israel. (NAB)

Egypt was a Roman province independent of Herod, and much inhabited by the Jews. Therefore it was an easy and convenient place of refuge. Once Egypt was considered a house of bondage. Yet before it had become known as a house of bondage, it had been a house of refuge. Now it has returned to its first use once again. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him](#) -- Before the Magi had even reached Bethlehem, Herod had already formed his murderous purpose.

There is an indirect hint in this verse that Joseph was no more than the child's guardian in the words [take the child and his mother](#). (internet--Crosswalk site)

Egypt includes the Sinai peninsula, and its nearest part was not far from Bethlehem. As early as the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. there was a Jewish story that Jesus learned magic in Egypt. Such tales, some of which date his visit to the reign of Jannaeus (104-78 B.C.), are probably based on Matthew, and are not independent evidence for the flight into Egypt. (IB)

Verse 14:

Doubtless it was the same night of Joseph's dream. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 15:

The fulfillment citation is taken from Hosea 11:1. Israel, God's son, was called out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus; Jesus, the Son of God, will similarly be called out of that land in a new exodus. The father-son relationship between God and the nation is set in a higher key. Here the son is not a group adopted as "son of God," but the child who, as conceived by the Holy Spirit, stands in unique relation to God. He is son of David and of Abraham, of Mary and of Joseph, but, above all, of God. (NAB)

[until the death of Herod](#) -- The Magi had been warned in a dream not to report to Herod, and now Joseph was warned in a dream to take Mary and the child to Egypt. This gives a vivid portrayal of the purpose of Herod. Joseph was to keep Mary and Jesus in Egypt until the death of Herod the monster. Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1 to show that this was in fulfillment of God's purpose to call his Son out of Egypt. He may have quoted from a collection of testimony rather than from the LXX. There is a Jewish tradition in the Talmud that Jesus "brought with him magic arts out of Egypt in an incision on his body." This attempt to ascribe the Lord's miracles to Satanic agency seems to be independent of Matthew, and may have been known to him, so that one object of his account may have been to combat it. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The details of Herod's death can be found in Josephus' Antiquities. Book 17. Chapters 6, 7, and 8. (Internet--Crosswalk site) [Copies of text provided upon request]

[Out of Egypt](#) -- The quotation of Hosea 11:1 (according to the Masoretic Text) illustrates the freedom with which Matthew employs the OT. The original refers to the "call" of the Exodus. Jesus is presented as re-enacting in his own life the career of Israel; for he is the new Israel. (JBC)

The story may be built up out of the quotation from the Hebrew text of Hosea 11:1. Early Christians often thought of the Exodus with its miracles as a type of Christian redemption (I Corinthians 10:1-5; John 6:49-51). The Rabbis likewise believed that it foreshadowed the messianic age, when all its miracles would be re-enacted. (IB)

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p. THE MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS
Matthew 2:16-18

3. Read Matthew 2:16-17
(1) No references
4. Read Matthew 2:18
(1) Jeremiah 31:15

Matthew 2:16-18

- 16 When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi.
- 17 Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet:
- 18 “A voice heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be consoled, since they were no more.”

Verse 16:

Herod wonders why his messengers, with pious zeal, are not hastening with the news that all is ready to receive him as a worshipper. What can be keeping them? Have they lost their way? Has any disaster befallen them? Then finally his patience is [what patience??] exhausted. He makes inquiries only to find that they are already far beyond his reach, and on their way home. He did not like being made a fool of--proud kings cannot stand this kind of rebuff. So Herod burns with murderous rage as he sent a band of hired murderers to kill the male children. He had carefully determined the estimated age of the young child from the magi's accounts of when they had first seen the star at its rising. In this ferocious step Herod was like himself--as crafty as he was cruel. He takes a large sweep, not to miss his mark. He thinks that this will surely embrace his victim. Skeptics and skeptical critics might wonder why the massacre of the Innocents is not recorded in Josephus' Antiquities since he is usually minute enough in detailing the cruelties of Herod? This answer to this question is not difficult to surmise if we consider how small a town Bethlehem was at that time, and it would likely have had very few male children two years and under. When we think of the number of more monstrous atrocities which Josephus has recorded of him, it is unreasonable to make anything of his silence about this incident. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The flight of Joseph was justified, for Herod was violently enraged that he had been mocked by the Magi: deluded in fact. Herod did not know, of course, how old the child was, but he took no chances and included all the little boys in Bethlehem two years old and under, perhaps there were no more than fifteen or twenty children of this age group in Bethlehem at the time. It is no surprise that Josephus makes no note of this small item in Herod's chamber of horrors. It was another fulfillment of the prophecy in Jeremiah 31:15. The quotation from Jeremiah 2:18 seems to be from the LXX text. It was originally written of the Babylonian captivity but it has a striking illustration in this case also. It has been noted by one scholar that it was better to be Herod's sow than his

son, for the sow had a better chance of living. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The account fits the character of Herod, who for political reasons murdered many people, including his sons and other relatives. Augustus is said to have remarked that he would rather be Herod's pig than his son. Josephus is our principal authority for Herod's life, and evidently did not know about this particular slaughter. According to the Talmud, Pharaoh killed the Israelite children because of a prophecy that the redeemer of Israel would be born. [Two years old and younger](#) indicates that the astrologers first saw the star two years before. (IB)

Verse 17:

This quotation comes from Jeremiah 31:15 with the difference of verbal usage. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 18:

As these words stand in Jeremiah, they relate to the Babylonian captivity. Rachel, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, was buried in the neighborhood of Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19), where her tomb is still known. She is figuratively represented as rising from the tomb and uttering a double lament for the loss of her children--first, by bitter captivity, and now by a bloody death. (Internet -- Crosswalk site)

Jeremiah 31:15 portrays Rachel, wife of the patriarch Jacob, weeping for her children taken into exile at the time of the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom (722-21 B.C.). Bethlehem was traditionally identified with Ephrath, the place near which Rachel was buried (Genesis 35:19; 48:7), and the mourning of Rachel is here applied to the lost children of a later age. Ramah is about six miles north of Jerusalem. The lamentation of Rachel is so great as to be heard at a far distance. (NAB)

[a voice heard in Ramah](#) -- Jeremiah 31:14 is quoted with similar freedom; the quotation follows neither the LXX nor the MT exactly. The original text refers to the destruction of the monarchy of north Israel by the Assyrians in 721 B.C. The confusion of Ephrath in the territory of Benjamin with Bethlehem is as old as the gloss on Genesis 35:19. A Moslem shrine just north of Bethlehem, identified with the tomb of Rachel, rests on an early tradition. (JBC)

Rachel was ancestress of Benjamin and Ephraim. Her traditional tomb is at Ramath Rachel, halfway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Ramah was an Ephraimite town eight miles north of Jerusalem. Jeremiah 31:15 has in mind the Ephraimites going into exile in Babylon. (IB)

Summary from JBC:

The tragic episode of the Innocents is mentioned in no other literature, canonical or profane. This raises the serious questions about the historical character of the incident. Such a wanton action is in harmony with the character of Herod as Josephus has described it (Antiquities. Book 15. Chapter 3. #3). Josephus depicts Herod as being pathologically jealous of his power--a number of his family were murdered by him because he suspected them of trying to supplant him. There is no doubt that Josephus meant to paint Herod as black as he could, and it is difficult to explain the absence of the Bethlehem incident in Josephus except on the hypothesis that he knew nothing about it. That he should have omitted it because of its interest for Christians is unlikely. Josephus has demonstrated his ability to write history according to his own ends. Therefore it

should be considered that the incidents of chapter 2 possibly represent a symbolic presentation of the royal messiahship of Jesus and the opposition of secular power to this messiahship. The opposition finally achieved its purpose in the passion of Jesus.

Summary from IB:

Here is a problem of pain in its stark and terrible maximum. Ramah is our world, and the cry heard in Ramah has often been the voice of the world's weeping. It is no comfort, but only doubled sorrow, to say that others suffer loss. It is poor comfort to say that many children are spared; that fact sharpens the sense of inequality. It is not enough comfort to plead that sorrow refines life; for sorrow, in itself and unredeemed, is not purification, but death. There is no logic to explain the slaughter by Herod. By any attempted logic Rachel ... would not be comforted.

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q. THE RETURN FROM EGYPT
Matthew 2:19-23
Luke 2:39-40

5. Read Matthew 2:19
(1) No references
6. Read Matthew 2:20
(1) Exodus 4:19
7. Read Matthew 2:21-22
(1) No references
8. Read Matthew 2:23
(1) Matthew 13:54 (4) Luke 4:34
(2) Mark 1:9 (5) John 19:19
(3) Luke 2:39

Matthew 2:19-23

- 19 When Herod had died, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt
- 20 and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead."
- 21 He rose, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.
- 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go back there. And because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee.
- 23 He went and dwelt in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazorean."

Verse 19:

Some translators use the term “an angel” rather than “the angel.” As the same angel seems to have been employed on all these high occasions, “the angel” is preferable to “an angel.” (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The return from Egypt dated after the death of Herod in 4 B.C. Herod's kingdom was divided by Augustus among three of Herod's surviving sons: Archelaus (Judea, Samaria, Idumea), Herod Antipas (Galilee and Perea) and Philip (the territory to the east and north of Galilee). At the petition of the Jews Augustus denied the title of king to Archelaus and gave him the title of ethnarch. His government was so unsatisfactory that he was deposed and exiled to Gaul in 6 A.D. The warning given to Joseph in a dream explains why Jesus, although born in Bethlehem, was reared in Galilee and was known as a Galilean. Luke, which agrees with Matthew both on Bethlehem and Galilee, explains the relation of the two places in a different way: Joseph and Mary were originally residents of Galilee and were only temporary visitors to Bethlehem when Jesus was born. (JBC)

Verse 20:

[go to the land of Israel](#) -- Not the land of Judea, for he was afterward expressly warned not to settle there, nor to Galilee, for he went there only when he found it unsafe to settle in Judea; rather he was to return to the Holy Land in general, and not to any particular place since the particular province was not indicated thus far. So Joseph and Mary had, like Abraham, gone out, not knowing exactly where they were to go, until they received further instruction. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[those who sought the child's life are dead](#) -- This was a common expression in most languages where only one person is meant, who in this case is Herod. The words are taken from the strikingly analogous case in Exodus 4:19, which probably suggested the plural here. The command is given to Moses to return to Egypt for the same reason that the child Jesus was now ordered to be brought back from it--the death of the one who sought his life. Herod died in the seventieth year of his age, and the thirty-seventh of his reign. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The influence of the OT appears in this phrase; it is taken almost literally from Exodus 4:19. (JBC)

Only Herod had sought to kill the young child, but it is a general statement of a particular fact as is common with people who say: “they say.” The idiom may be suggested by Exodus 4:19. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[for those who sought the child's life are dead](#) -- Moses, who had fled from Egypt because the Pharaoh sought to kill him (Exodus 2:15), was told to return there, “for all the men who sought your life are dead” (Exodus 4:19). (NAB)

“sought the child's life” is a Semitic expression derived from the story of Moses (Exodus 4:19) (IB)

Verse 21:

Joseph intended to return to Bethlehem of Judea to raise the child Jesus. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 22:

Archelaus succeeded to Judea, Samaria, and Idumea; but Augustus refused him the title of king until it should be seen how he conducted himself. He was given only the

title of ethnarch by Augustus (Josephus, Antiquities. Book 17. Chapter 11. #4). He never rose above this title. The people recognized him as his father's successor; and so it is here that he "reigned in the room of his father Herod." But, after ten years defiance of the Jewish law and cruel tyranny, the people lodged heavy complaints against him, and the emperor banished him to Vienne in Gaul, reducing Judea again to a Roman province. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Joseph was afraid to return to Bethlehem for the very reasons noted above. The whole country west of the Jordan was at this time divided into three provinces: Galilee being the northern, Judea the southern, and Samaria, the central province. The province of Galilee was under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, the brother of Archelaus, his father having left him Galilee and Perea, on the east side of the Jordan, as his share of the kingdom, with the title tetrarch, which Augustus confirmed. Though crafty and licentious, according to Josephus--precisely what the Gospel history shows him to be--he was of a less cruel disposition than Archelaus. Since Nazareth was a good distance from the seat of government, and considerably secluded, it was safer to settle there. (Internet -- Crosswalk site)

Joseph was already afraid to go to Judea because Archelaus was reigning. In a fret at last before his death Herod had changed his will again and put Archelaus, the worst of his living sons, in the place of Antipas. So Joseph went to Galilee. Matthew has had nothing about the previous dwelling of Joseph and Mary in Nazareth. We learn that from Luke who tells nothing of the flight into Egypt. The two narratives supplement one another and are in no sense contradictory. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

With the agreement of the emperor Augustus, Archelaus received half of his father's kingdom, including Judea, after Herod's death. He had the title "ethnarch (that is, ruler of a nation) and reigned from 4 B.C. until 6 A.D. (NAB)

Herod willed Judea, Samaria, and Idumea to Archelaus with the title of king, but Augustus granted him only the rank of ethnarch. Many Jews opposed his accession. His brutality soon manifested itself (Josephus, Antiquities. Book XVII. Chapter 13. #2 and Jewish War. Book II. Chapter 6. #2) and he was removed in 6 A.D. and banished. Thenceforth Palestine was a small imperial province ruled by a procurator except in the time of King Herod Agrippa I (41-44 A.D.) (IB)

Verse 23:

Nazareth is a small town in lower Galilee, lying in the territory of the tribe of Zebulun, and about equally distant from the Mediterranean Sea on the west and the Sea of

Galilee on the east. If, from Luke 2:39, one could conclude that the parents of Jesus brought him straight back to Nazareth after his presentation in the temple--as if there had been no visit of the Magi, no flight into Egypt, no stay there, and no purpose on returning to settle again in Bethlehem--one might, from Matthew's way of speaking here, equally conclude that Mary and Joseph had never been at Nazareth until now. If we did know the exact sources from which Matthew and Luke gained their different information, and the mode in which these were used, this apparent discrepancy would probably disappear at once. However, the exact sources and the exact mode are not known to us. In neither case is there any inaccuracy. At the same time, it is difficult with these facts before us, to conceive that either of them wrote his particular Gospel with the knowledge of the other. Many think this is a precarious inference though. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Nazarene is probably a preferable term than is [Nazorean](#). The best explanation of this name appears to be that which traces it to the word *netzer* in Isaiah 11:1--the small twig, sprout, or sucker, which the prophet there says "shall come forth from the stem (or rather, 'stump') of Jesse, the branch which should fructify from his roots." The little town of Nazareth, mentioned neither in the OT nor in Josephus, was probably so called from its insignificance. A weak twig in contrast to a stately tree; and a special contempt seemed to rest upon it. John 1:46 states: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Over and above the general contempt in which all Galilee was held, from the number of Gentiles that settled in the upper territories of it, and, in the estimation of the Jews, debased it. Thus, in the providential arrangement by which our Lord was brought up in the insignificant and opprobrious town called Nazareth, there was involved, (1) a local humiliation, (2) an allusion to Isaiah's prediction of his lowly, twig-like upbringing from the branchless, dried-up stump of Jesse, and yet (3) a standing memorial of that humiliation which "the prophets," in a number of the most striking predictions, had attached to the Messiah. (Internet-- Crosswalk site)

Matthew says [so that what has been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled](#). It is the plural and no single prophecy exists which says that the Messiah was to be called a Nazarene. It may be that this term of contempt (John 1:46; John 7:52) is what is meant, and that several prophecies are combined like Psalm 22:6, 8; Psalm 69:11, 19; and Isaiah 52:2, 3, 4. The name Nazareth means a shoot or branch, but it is by no means certain that Matthew has this in mind. It is best to confess that we do not know. But, despised as Nazareth was at that time, Jesus has exalted its fame. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The text of "the prophets" quoted is found nowhere in the OT. Nazareth is not mentioned in the OT. The most probable explanation of the "quotation" is a wordplay based on the Hebrew text of Isaiah 11:1: "A shoot shall rise from Jesse, and a branch (*neser*) shall sprout from his roots." There is an assonance between the word *neser* and the town name Nazareth. (JBC)

[Nazareth ... he shall be called a Nazorean](#) -- the tradition of Jesus' residence in Nazareth was firmly established, and Matthew sees it as being in accordance with the foreannounced plan of God. The town of Nazareth is not mentioned in the OT, and no such prophecy can be found there. The vague expression "through the prophets" may be due to Matthew's seeing a connection between Nazareth and certain texts in which there are words with a remote similarity to the name of that town. Some such OT texts are Isaiah 11:1 where the Davidic king of the future is called a "bud" (*neser*) that shall blossom from the roots of Jesse, and Judges 13:5, 7 where Samson, the future deliverer of Israel from the Philistines, is called one who shall be consecrated (a *nazir*) to God. (NAB)

The allusion to "he shall be called a Nazorean" may be to Judges 13:5, or perhaps Isaiah 11:1. Matthew apparently plays on words as the rabbis loved to do. The village of Nazareth is not mentioned in any ancient records. For this and other reasons it has been occasionally doubted whether "Nazorean" means "man from Nazareth", but this is still the most likely explanation. The village en-Nasira is traditionally identified with Nazareth. (IB)

Summary from IB:

Nazareth stands as a symbol of our common life; it was a town without much pride of history. A typical town. But it was not remote. Important caravan routes passed near it, and it echoed with news of the world. Jesus shared the commonalty, and lived at the friction points of life. Nazarene may have been originally “Nazorean”, which means “preserver.” Matthew may have been intent to show that in Jesus and his followers Israel found the true remnant by which life is bequeathed to our world. (IB)

* * * * *

9. Read Luke 2:39
(1) Matthew 2:23

10. Read Luke 2:40
(1) Luke 1:80 (2) Luke 2:52

Luke 2:39-40

- 39 When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.
- 40 The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Verse 39:

Luke tells nothing of the flight to Egypt, and the return to Nazareth instead of Bethlehem, the place of Jesus’ birth as told in Matthew 2:13-23. But then neither Gospel gives all the details of this period. Luke has also nothing about the visit of the magi (Matthew 2:1-12) as Matthew tells nothing of the shepherds and Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:8-28). The two Gospels supplement each other. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Nothing is more difficult than to fix the precise order in which the visit of the Magi, with the flight into and return from Egypt are to be taken, in relation to the circumcision and presentation of Christ in the temple. It is perhaps best to leave this in the obscurity in which we find it, as the result of two independent, though if we knew easily reconcilable narratives. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 40:

This child grew into a hearty vigorous little boy according to the original Greek terms. In addition to the bodily development Luke has “filled with wisdom.” The process of filling with wisdom kept pace with the bodily growth. We need not be troubled over this growth in wisdom on the part of Jesus any more than over his bodily growth. The intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth of the child like the physical was real. His was a perfect humanity developing perfectly, unimpeded by hereditary or acquired defects. It was the first instance of such a growth in history. It was the first time a human infant was realizing the ideal of humanity.” (Internet--Crosswalk site)

His mental development kept pace with his bodily, and the grace of God, the divine favor, rested manifestly and increasingly upon him. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Very simply the Gospel points out the necessity of Jesus’ hidden life in Nazareth, that he might grow strong in the full experience of a human nature; thus he might be able

to bring the Spirit of God into immediate contact with every human area. **filled with wisdom** -- God's practical, all-embracing plan of salvation (Proverbs 8:22ff., Sirach 24).
(JBC)

SESSION 10

Next week we are going to take a break so that everyone might spend some time reflecting on the sessions studied thus far. When we continue we will begin studying about Jesus' adult life. In this session, we will be studying the only mention of Jesus' boyhood years, and we will learn through the commentary about the typical life of a Jewish boy Jesus' age in Nazareth. We will also discuss whether or not the typical childhood might have been any different from the way Jesus was raised.

Overview from LToJC:

Of the many years spent in Nazareth during which Jesus passed from infancy to childhood, then from childhood to youth, and finally from youth to manhood, the Evangelic narrative has left us with only the briefest report. Considering what loving care watched over Jewish child-life, and the deep interest that would naturally be attached to the early life of the Messiah, the silence we find in our Gospels is in direct contrast to the almost blasphemous absurdities of the Apocryphal Gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John teaches most impressively that the Gospels furnish a history of our Savior, and not a biography of Jesus of Nazareth.

Recalling what we have studied thus far from Matthew's account we discover that he summarized the whole outward history in one sentence of the life of Jesus while in Nazareth. Henceforth, Jesus would stand out before the Jews of His time (and of all time) by the distinctive designation "of Nazareth". In the mind of a Palestinian a peculiar significance would attach to the name of the Messiah, especially in its connection with the general teaching of prophetic Scripture. We need to remember that Matthew primarily addressed his Gospel to Palestinian readers, and that his Gospel is the Jewish presentation of the Messiah as meeting Jewish expectancy. We need to consider how He would stand out before the Jewish mind. Matthew speaks "of Nazareth", and these words would remind the Jews that they had derived no fewer than eight designations, or Names, by which the Messiah was to be called. The most prominent among them was that of "Branch." We call it the most prominent, not only because it is based upon the clearest Scripture-testimony, but because it evidently occupied the foremost rank in Jewish thinking, being embodied in the earliest portion of their daily liturgy. What is expressed for the Jewish word "Branch" is also conveyed by another Jewish term for "Branch" that is found in Isaiah 11:1, which was likewise applied to the Messiah. The more significant is the fact that it was not a self-chosen name, but arose, in the providence of God, from what otherwise might have been called the accident of his residence. We admit that this is a Jewish view, but then the Gospel According to Matthew is the Jewish view of the Messiah. [Our English word "branch" is a translation of "nezer" which is close to the etymology of the word Nazarene. The "ene" at the end of Nazarene signifies the land of Nazare. If we combine these thoughts we end with the "land of the branch." Thus in Jewish thought it would represent the "land of the Messiah." = Nazareth. MINE]

Greater contrast could scarcely be imagined than between the intricate scholastic studies of the Judeans, and the active pursuits that engaged the men in Galilee. It was a common saying that "if a person wishes to be rich, let him go north; if he wants to be wise, let him come south" -- and to Judea flocked whoever wished to learn the law. The

very neighborhood of the Gentile world, the contact with the great commercial centers close by, and the constant intercourse with foreigners, who passed through Galilee along one of the world's great highways, would render the narrow exclusiveness of the southerners impossible. Galilee was to Judaism "the Court of the Gentiles, whereas the rabbinical schools of Judea was its "innermost sanctuary." The natural disposition of the people, even the soil and the climate of Galilee, were not favorable to the all-engrossing passion for Rabbinical studies as was found in Judea. In Judea all seemed to invite retrospection and introspection; to favor habits of solitary thought and study, until it kindled with fanaticism. Mile by mile as one traveled southwards, memories of the past would crowd around, and thoughts of the future would rise within. Avoiding the great towns as the centers of hated heathenism, the traveler would meet few foreigners, but everywhere encounter those gaunt representatives of what was regarded as the most excellent of his religion. These were the embodiment of Jewish piety and asceticism, the possessors and expounders of the mysteries of his faith, the fountain-head of wisdom, who were not only sure of heaven themselves, but knew its secrets and were its aristocracy; men who could tell others all about his own religion, practice its most minute injunctions, and could interpret every stroke and letter of the law even to pronounce an action lawful or unlawful, and to remit and retain sins by declaring a man liable to, or free from, expiatory sacrifices, or else punishment in this or the next world. Reason, duty, and precept bound the traveler to reverence the Rabbis just as he revered God. They seemed almost like colleagues in the heavenly Sanhedrin -- they were its interpreters, representatives, deputies, and intimate companions. Even nature itself, might seem to foster such tendencies. With distant Jerusalem always in the far background, all would favor solitary thought and religious abstraction.

It was quite different in Galilee. The smiling landscape of lower Galilee invited the easy labor of agriculture. Even the highlands of upper Galilee were gloriously grand, free, fresh, and bracing which was unlike those of Judaea which were somber, lonely, and enthusiasm killing. A more beautiful country could scarcely be imagined than in Galilee proper. According to the Rabbis, it was easier to rear a forest of olive-trees in Galilee than one child in Judea. It also had a teeming population. Making every allowance for exaggeration, we cannot entirely ignore the account of Josephus about the 240 towns and villages of Galilee, each with not less than 15,000 inhabitants. In the centers of industry all the then known trades were busily carried on.

Galilee was not the home of Rabbinism, instead it consisted of generous spirits, of warm, impulsive hearts, of intense nationalism, of simple matters, and of earnest piety. Such a race would also be excitable, passionate, and even violent at times. The Talmud accuses them of being quarrelsome, but admits that they cared more for honor than money. In religious observances their practice was simpler, and as regarded canon-law they often took independent views, and generally followed the interpretations of those who, in opposition to that great religious teacher in Judea, Akiba, inclined to the more mild and rational application of traditionalism. The Talmud mentions several points in which the practice of the Galileans differed from that of Judea--all either in the direction of more practical earnestness, or of alleviation of Rabbinic rigorism. On the other hand, they were looked down upon as neglecting traditionalism, unable to rise to its speculative heights, and preferring the attractions of the Haggadah to the logical subtleties of the

Halakhah. There was a general contempt in Rabbinic circles for all that was Galilean. Although the Judean or Jerusalem dialect was far from pure, the people of Galilee were especially blamed for neglecting the study of their language, charged with errors in grammar, and especially with absurd mis-pronunciation, sometimes leading to ridiculous mistakes.

It was among such a people that Jesus spent by far the longest part of his life on earth. Generally, this period may be described as that of his true and full human development--physical, spiritual, intellectual--of outward submission to man, and inward submission to God, with the attendant results of wisdom, favor, and grace. These thirty years of Human life were needed so that the overpowering thought of his Divinity might not overshadow that of his humanity. If he was subject to such conditions, they must, in the nature of things, have affected his development. Having entered life as the Divine Infant, he began it as a human child, subject to all its conditions, yet perfect in them.

During that time, the conditions in Galilee were the happiest conceivable. The Gentile world presented a terrible contrast to that of the Jewish world in regard to the relation of parents and children, and the character and moral object of their upbringing. Education begins in the home and it is imparted by influence and example in the home, before it comes by teaching. It is acquired by what is seen and heard before it is laboriously learned from books; and its real object becomes instinctively felt, before its goal is consciously sought. The relationship of father has its highest sanction and embodiment in that of God towards Israel; the tenderness and care of a mother is that of the watchfulness and pity of the Lord over his people.

2. BOYHOOD OF JESUS THE KING

Luke 2:41-52

1. Read Luke 2:41-52 entirely through one time.
2. Read Luke 2:41
 - (1) Exodus 12:24-27
 - (2) Exodus 23:15
 - (3) Deuteronomy 16:1-6
3. Read Luke 2:42
 - (1) No references

Luke 2:41-42

- 41 Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover,
42 and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom.

Overview:

This story's concern with an incident from Jesus' youth is unique in the canonical gospel tradition. It presents Jesus in the role of the faithful Jewish boy, raised in the traditions of Israel, and fulfilling all that the law requires. With this episode, the infancy narrative ends just as it began, in the setting of the Jerusalem temple. (NAB)

This sole incident, breaking the Gospel silence of "the hidden years" of Jesus, is

narrated in a way that is sharply different from the other, apocryphal gospels. In the canonical gospel of Luke, Mary and Joseph presume Jesus to act as any normal boy would act; but the apocryphal gospels distort that normalcy by multiplying all kinds of extravagant miracles. The closest parallel is Josephus' story of his own boyhood (Josephus. Life. Book 2. Chapter 9), describing his reputation for learning among the chief priests and rulers of Jerusalem. Luke's account, by contrast, is reserved and unassuming. (JBC)

The early church appears to have had no interest in the life of Jesus before his emergence as a teacher, and it preserved no tradition of his boyhood apart from this one incident. At a later date, unfettered imagination undertook to make up the deficiency. Compilations of legends such as the Gospel of Thomas gave marvelous and often grotesque and repulsive accounts of Jesus as an exhibitionist and as a boy wonder. The simplicity and restraint of Luke's story stand out in contrast. No doubt the story was originally independent of the nativity cycle. It refers without affectation to Jesus' parents (verses 41 and 43) and to his father (verse 48). It betrays no knowledge of any supernatural portents that could account for Jesus' concern for "his Father's house." Luke uses it to illustrate Jesus' growth in wisdom and in the favor of God (verses 40 and 52), and to connect the birth and infancy cycle with the narratives of the baptism and the public ministry. (IB)

Josephus' egotistic description of his cleverness as a youth has been cited as a remote analogy in Jewish literature to Luke's story. For example, he says: "While still a mere boy, about fourteen years old, I won universal applause for my love of letters; insomuch that the chief priests and the leading men of the city used constantly to come to me for precise information on some particular in our ordinances" (Josephus. Life. Book 9). It is true that the note of youthful precocity is frequently found in ancient biographical literature and was introduced in time into the Christian story. The apocryphal Gospel of Thomas represents Jesus as instructing the rabbis in its 19th chapter. Christian art has often portrayed the scene under the caption: "The boy Jesus teaching in the temple." The stress in Luke's story is on Jesus' early interest in matters of religion. "Jesus learning in the Temple" would be a better title. In the course of their instruction Jesus asks questions of the teachers, and answers those they propound. (IB)

Verse 41:

Every male was originally expected to appear at the Passover, Pentecost, and tabernacles (Exodus 23:14-17; Exodus 34:23; Deuteronomy 16:16). But the dispersion rendered that impossible. Pious Palestinian Jews made a point of going at least to the Passover. Mary went with Joseph as a pious habit, although not required by law to go. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[each year his parents went to Jerusalem](#) -- The law prescribed the Jerusalem pilgrimage for three major feasts: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14; Deuteronomy 16:16); but custom excused those who lived at a distance from all but the Passover. The rabbis were not in agreement whether or not women and children were required to make the pilgrimage. (JBC)

Attendance at three annual festivals were prescribed for male Israelites by the regulations of Exodus 23:14-17 and Deuteronomy 16:16. Women were not obliged to make the pilgrimage but frequently did so (I Samuel 1:7 and 2:19). (IB)

Verse 42:

twelve years old -- Luke does not say that Jesus had not been to Jerusalem before, but at twelve a Jewish boy became a “son of the law” and began to observe the ordinances, putting on the phylacteries as a reminder. We can find a loose connection in the words **they went up** for the incident took place after they had gone up, not while they were going up. What might be meant is something like: “On their usual going up.” (Internet--Crosswalk site)

twelve years old -- A year before the age at which a boy officially reached manhood; the event is celebrated today with the ceremony of Bar Mitzvah. (JBC)

Although males only were required to go up to Jerusalem at the three annual festivals (Exodus 23:14-17), devout women, when family duties permitted, went also, as did Hannah (I Samuel 1:7), and, as we see here, the mother of Jesus. At the age of twelve every Jewish boy was styled “a son of the law”, being put under a course of instruction and trained to fasting and attendance on public worship, besides being set to learn a trade. At this age accordingly our Lord is taken up for the first time to Jerusalem, at the Passover season, the chief of the three annual festivals. (IB)

Talmudic tradition asserts that even boys of tender years were required to make their appearance in the temple at festivals. **When he was twelve years old** indicates only that the incident took place after Jesus had attained his adolescence. It is not stated that it was the occasion of his first visit. **The feast** of the Passover and of Unleavened Bread occupied a period of seven days. The boy Jesus had been allowed a measure of independence. As his parents returned to Galilee, they supposed he was in the caravan and looked for him only at the end of a day’s journey. (IB)

Summary from LToJC:

From the first days of his existence, a religious atmosphere surrounded the child of Jewish parents. Admitted to the number of God’s chosen people by the deeply significant rite of circumcision, when his name was first spoken in the accents of prayer, he was henceforth separated unto God. Whether or not he accepted the privileges and obligations implied in this dedication, they came to him directly from God, as much as the circumstances of his birth. The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of Israel, the God of the promises claimed him, with all of the blessings which this conveyed, and of the responsibility which resulted from it. To the Jew there was a special devotion to the Law, the all in all, the sum of intellectual pursuits, the aim of life.

The first education was necessarily the mother’s. The Jews express this as: “knowledge of the Law may be looked for in those who have sucked it in at their mother’s breast.” Religious duties were exclusively the responsibility of the mothers of infants. The responsibility for the Sabbath meal, the kindling of the Sabbath lamp, and the setting apart of a portion of the dough from the bread for the household, fell exclusively upon them. These were instances in which an infant or toddler would become familiar as he clung to his mother’s skirts. Even before he could follow her in such religious household duties, his eyes must have been attracted to the Mezuzah attached to the door-post, as the name of the Most High on the outside of the little folded parchment was reverently touched by each who came and went, and then the fingers kissed that had come in contact with the Holy Name. The duty of the Mezuzah was incumbent on

women also. In popular opinion, it was the symbol of the Divine guard over Israel's homes.

There could not be national history, nor even romance, to compare with that by which a Jewish mother might hold her child entranced. Long before he could go to school, or even synagogue, the private and united prayers and the domestic rites, whether of the weekly Sabbath or of festive seasons, would indelibly impress themselves upon his mind. In mid-winter there was the festive illumination in each home. In most houses, the first night only one candle was lit, the next two were lit, and so on to the eighth day--the child would learn that this was symbolic and commemorative of the Dedication of the Temple, its purgation, and the restoration of its services by the lion-hearted Judas the Maccabee. Next came, in earliest spring, the merry time of Purim, the feast of Esther and of Israel's deliverance through her, with its good cheer and boisterous enjoyments. Although the Passover might call the rest of the family to Jerusalem, the rigid exclusion of all leaven during the whole week could not pass without its impressions. Then, after the Feast of Weeks, came bright summer. But its golden harvest and its rich fruits would remind of the early dedication of the first and best to the Lord, and of those solemn processions in which it was carried up to Jerusalem. As autumn seared the leaves, the Feast of the New Year spoke of the casting up of man's accounts in the great Book of Judgment, and the fixing of destiny for good or for evil. Then followed the Fast of the Day of Atonement, with its tremendous solemnities, the memory of which could never fade from mind or imagination; and, last of all, in the week of the Feast of Tabernacles, there were the strange leafy booths in which they lived and enjoyed, keeping their harvest thanksgiving; and praying and longing for the better harvest of a renewed world.

It was only through sight and hearing that, from its very inception, life in Israel became religious. There was also from the first positive teaching which would necessarily be the responsibility of the mother. Jewish mothers didn't need the extravagant laudations, nor the promises held out by the Rabbis to carry out this duty. If they were true to their descent, it would come almost naturally to them. Scripture set before them a continuous succession of noble Hebrew mothers. It was truly no idle boast that the Jews "were from their swaddling clothes trained to recognize God as their Father, and as Maker of the world." Having been taught the knowledge of the laws from their earliest youth, they bore in their souls the image of the commandments. From their earliest consciousness they learned the laws, so as to have them engraved upon the soul. They were brought up in learning, exercised in the laws, and made acquainted with the acts of their predecessors in order to imitate them.

While the earliest religious teaching would, of necessity, come from the lips of the mother, it was the father who was bound to teach his son. To impart to the child knowledge of the Torah conferred as great a spiritual distinction, as if a man had received the Law itself on Mount Horeb. As soon as the child learned to speak, his religious instruction began--no doubt, with such verses of Holy Scripture that formed a part of the Jewish liturgy. The Shema, in particular. Then would follow other passages from the Bible, short prayers, and select sayings of the sages. Special attention was given to the culture of the memory, since forgetfulness might prove as fatal in its consequences as ignorance or neglect of the law. Very early the child must have been taught what might be called his birthday text--some verse of Scripture beginning, or ending with, or at least

containing, the same letters as his Hebrew name. This guardian-promise the child would insert in its daily prayers. The earliest hymns taught would be the Psalms for the days of the week, or festive Psalms, such as the Hallel, or those connected with the festive pilgrimages to Jerusalem.

The child's regular instruction commenced with his fifth or sixth year, when every child was sent to school. The existence of such schools was without a doubt located throughout the land. We find references to them at almost every period. The existence of higher schools and Academies would not have been possible without such primary instruction. Two Rabbis, especially distinguished and beloved on account of their educational labors, were among the last victims of Herod's cruelty. Schools were introduced in every town. It was a compulsory law that education and attendance be provided in them for all children above the age of six. To pass over the fabulous number of schools supposed to have existed in Jerusalem, tradition had it that, despite this, the city only fell because of the neglect of the education of the children. It was even deemed unlawful to live in a place where there was no school. Such a city deserved to be either destroyed or excommunicated.

From the teaching of the alphabet or of writing, onwards to the farthest limits of instruction in the most advanced Academies of the Rabbis, all were marked with extreme care. The ultimate object being the advancement of wisdom, accuracy, and a moral with religious purpose. For a long time it was not uncommon to teach in the open air; but this must have been chiefly in connection with theological discussions and the instruction of youths. The children were gathered in synagogues, or in school-houses, where at first they either stood, teacher and pupil alike, or else sat on the ground in a semicircle, facing the teacher, as it were, literally to carry into practice the prophetic saying: "Thine eyes shall see thy teachers." The introduction of benches and chairs was of a later date; but the principle was always the same, that in respect to accommodation there was no distinction between teacher and student. Thus, encircled by his pupils, the teacher imparted to them the precious knowledge of the Law, with constant adaptation to their mental capacity, with unwearied patience, intense earnestness, strictness tempered by kindness, but above all, with the highest object of their training always in view.

Roughly classifying the subjects of study, it was held, that up to the age of ten, the Bible was exclusively the textbook. From the age of ten to fifteen, it was the Mishnah, or traditional law. Then after that age the student could enter on those theological discussions which occupied time and attention in the higher academies of the Rabbis. This type of progression was not always made though. If after three, or up to five, years (that is, after they had entered the Mishnic studies) the child had not shown decided aptitude, little hope was entered for his future.

The study of the Bible commenced with the Book of Leviticus. Then it passed to the other parts of the Pentateuch, then to the prophets, and finally to the Hagiographa. What now constitutes the Gemara or Talmad was taught in the Academies. Access to these academies could not be gained until the child had reached the age of fifteen. Care was taken not to send a child to school too early, and not to overwork him while he was there. The school hours were fixed, and they were shortened during the summer months.

The teaching of the school would be greatly aided by the services of the synagogue, and the deeper influence of home life. We know that, even in the

troublesome times which preceded the rising of the Maccabees, the possession of parts or the whole of the OT (whether in the original or the LXX rendering) was so common, that during the great persecutions a regular search was made throughout the land for every copy of Holy Scripture, and those who possessed them were punished. After the triumph of the Maccabees, these copies of the Bible would, of course, be greatly multiplied. Although perhaps only the wealthy could have purchased a manuscript of the whole OT in Hebrew, yet some portion or portions of the Word of God, in the original, would form the most cherished treasure of every pious household. Furthermore, a school for Bible study was attached to every academy, in which copies of the Holy Scripture would be kept. From anxious care to preserve the integrity of the text, it was deemed unlawful to make copies of small portions of a book of Scripture. But exception was made of certain sections which were copied for the instruction of children. Among them were the history of the creation to that of the flood.

It was in such circumstances, and under such influences, that the early years of Jesus passed. To go beyond this and lift the veil surrounding his early life would be presumptuous. It is all a “mystery of Godliness.” We do not even know with certainty whether the school system had, at that time, extended to far off Nazareth, nor whether the order and method which have been described were universally observed at that time. In all probability, however, there was such a school in Nazareth, and if so, Jesus would conform to the general practice of attendance. We can think of him then as learning his earliest earthly lesson from the Book of Leviticus. There were no learned Rabbis in Nazareth, either then or afterwards. He would attend the services of the synagogue where Moses and the prophets were read.

The words of Jesus, as recorded in Matthew and Luke, also imply that the Holy Scriptures which He read were in the original Hebrew, and that they were written in the square, or Assyrian, characters. Indeed, as the Pharisees and Sadducees always appealed to the Scriptures in the original, Jesus could not have met them on any other ground, and it was this which gave such emphasis to his frequent disagreements with them in the words: “Have you not read?” In his early child-life, when the Holy Scriptures were his special study, he must have read them, and what thoughts must have been kindled by their light! Perhaps now we can better understand the words: “And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.”

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4. Read Luke 2:43-45
(1) No references

Luke 2:43-45

- 43 After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.
44 Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances,
45 but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him.

Verse 43:

Accustomed to the obedience of Jesus, Joseph and Mary were thrown off guard,

and they left believing that Jesus was somewhere in the midst of the company they were traveling with. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The **days** may mean the full seven days, or the two principal days after which many of the pilgrims left for home. It was not disobedience on the part of Jesus that made him remain behind, but intense interest in the services of the temple. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 44:

On these sacred journeys, whole villages and districts traveled in groups together. This was for protection, partly for company, as well as for good discourse within the group. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The men usually went ahead and the women followed. Joseph may have thought Jesus was with Mary, while Mary thought that he was with Joseph. The Nazareth caravan was so long that it took a whole day to look through it. They searched up and down, back and forth, a thorough prolonged search, but in vain. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

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5. Read Luke 2:46-47
(1) No references

Luke 2:46-47

- 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers,
listening to them and asking them questions,
47 and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers.

Verse 46:

After three sorrowing days, they find Him still in Jerusalem, not gazing on its architecture, or surveying its forms of busy life, but in the temple. They didn't find him in the "sanctuary" to which only the priests had access, but in one of the enclosures around it where the "doctors" taught their scholars. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

After three days--one day out, one day back, and on the third day they found him. In the temple was probably on the terrace where members of the Sanhedrin gave public instruction on Sabbaths and feast-days, so probably while the feast was still going on. The rabbis probably sat on benches in a circle. The listeners on ground, among whom was the boy, Jesus, in a rapture of interest, both hearing them and asking them questions. Paul sat at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) Picture this eager boy alive with interest. It was his one opportunity in a theological school outside of the synagogue to hear the great rabbis expound the problems of the day. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The method of question and answer was the customary form of rabbinical teaching; teacher and learner becoming by turns questioner and answerer, as may be seen from their extant works. This would give full scope for all that "astonished them in His understanding and answers." Not that He assumed the office of teaching--his hour for that had not yet come, and his equipment for that was not complete; for he had yet to increase in wisdom as well as stature. There would most likely have been in his questions far more than was in their answers. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Jesus was sitting in the midst of the teachers probably in one of the outer halls of the temple. He is listening, asking questions, and giving answers to the questions put to him. By implication, however, Jesus is presented as the teacher at the center of a circle. He knows the Torah and its interpretations. In no way is he in opposition to Jewish Law and practice. (JBC)

We are perhaps to understand that several rabbis were engaging on this occasion in debate. (IB)

[three days](#) -- There may be a symbolic reference here to the three days of Jesus in the tomb. (JBC)

Verse 47:

The original Greek word for “were amazed” is descriptive of their continued and repeated astonishment. It has the meaning of them standing out of themselves as if their eyes were bulging out. The boy had a holy thirst for knowledge, and he used a boy’s way of learning. His understanding conveys to us that he grasped and comprehended the things that were spoken possibly by comparing and combining things. It is not difficult to ask hard questions, but Jesus had astounding answers to their questions, revealing his amazing intellectual and spiritual growth. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Summary from IB:

The boy of twelve did not go to Jerusalem with overbearing confidence to lay down the law as some of the apocryphal gospels would suggest. Instead he went with the eagerness of an open mind and with simplicity of spirit. He realized later that there was much which these teachers of the law did not understand, but his first instinctive attitude was one of winsome respect for those who were believed to be interpreters of the truth of God. It was part of the fact of the Incarnation that he should increase in wisdom, and this meant that in his boyhood years he had directed himself toward those influences from which he could learn. Undoubtedly he had gone to the synagogue school in Nazareth. He had brought back from there the best gift which can be acquired--the desire to learn more. It was this desire that he was expressing in Jerusalem as there among the teachers he was listening to them and asking them questions.

Summary from LToJC:

In strict law, personal observance of the ordinances, and hence attendance on the feasts at Jerusalem became one of a youth’s responsibilities only when he became of age, that is, at the age of thirteen. At that time he became what was known as a “son of the Torah.” But the legal age was in this respect anticipated by a year. It was in accordance with this custom that on the first Passover after Jesus had passed his twelfth year, his parents took him with them in the company of the Nazarenes to Jerusalem. Although women were not bound to make such personal appearance, Mary gladly availed herself of what seems to have been the direction of Hillel to go up to the solemn services of the sanctuary.

Politically, times had changed. Judea, Samaria, and Idumea were now incorporated into the Roman province of Syria, under its governor, or legate. The special administration of that part of Palestine was, however, entrusted to a procurator, whose ordinarily resided at Caesarea. Popular uprisings occurred during this time between the

census takers and the Jewish opposers which possibly made it unsafe for families to travel alone without the support of a group. To have a census taken of them (the Jewish people) was in their viewpoint the same as making them slaves to the Roman laws. Since they were owned by none other than God alone, the Romans were in violation of Jewish law.

When the child Jesus went to the temple at the age of twelve, Coponius would have most likely been procurator, and Annas would have ruled in the temple as High Priest. But, it was far other than political thoughts which were on the mind of Jesus at that time. There had been a period of calm for a time in the land, and there was nothing to provoke active resistance. The party of the Zealots, although in existence and striking deeper roots in the hearts of the people were, for the time being, what Josephus called "the philosophical party"--their minds were busy with an ideal, which their hands were not yet preparing to make a reality.

When the pilgrims' feet stood within the gates of Jerusalem, there could have been no difficulty in finding hospitality, however crowded the city may have been on such occasions. This will appear more true if we remember the extreme simplicity of Eastern manners and wants, and the abundance of provisions which the many sacrifices of the season would supply.

Glorious as the view of Jerusalem must have seemed to a child coming to it for the first time from the retirement of a Galilean village, we must bear in mind, that he who now looked upon it was no ordinary child. His one all-engrossing thought would be of the temple. This was perhaps the first conscious thought he had of that temple as the House of His Father, and with it the first conscious impulse of his mission and being. Here also it would be the higher meaning, rather than the structure and appearance of the temple, that would absorb his mind. And yet there was sufficient in them to kindle enthusiasm.

As the pilgrims ascended the Mount, crested by that symmetrically proportioned building which could hold within its gigantic girdle not fewer than 210,000 persons, his wonder might well increase at every step. The Mount itself seemed like an island, abruptly rising from out of deep valleys, surrounded by a sea of walls, palaces, streets, and houses, and crowned with a mass of snowy marble and glittering gold, rising terrace upon terrace. Altogether it measured a square of about 1,000 feet, or to be more exact 927 feet. At its northwestern angle, and connected with it frowned the Castle of Antonia, held by the Roman garrison.

The holy walls were pierced by massive gates--(1) the unused gate on the north (the Tedi), (2) the Susa Gate on the east which opened on the arched roadway to the Mount of Olives, (3) the two so-called Huldah gates which led to tunnels from the priest-suburb Ophel into the outer court; and (4) finally four gates on the west. Within the gates ran all around covered double colonnades with here and there benches for those who retired there for prayer, or for conference. The most magnificent of those were the southern, or twofold double colonnade with a wide space between; the most venerable would have been the ancient "Solomon's Porch" or eastern colonnade. Entering from the Xystus bridge (over the tunnel of the Huldah gates) to its eastern extremity over which another tower rose, probably was the "pinnacle" of the history of the Temptation. From this height yawned the Kedron valley 450 feet below. From that lofty pinnacle each morning the priest watched and announced the earliest streak of day. Passing along the

eastern colonnade, or Solomon's Porch, we would have reached the Susa Gate, the carved representation of that city over the gateway reminding us of the Eastern Dispersion. Here the standard measures of the Temple are said to have been kept; and here, also we have to locate (1) the first or lowest of the three Sanhedrins which, according to the Mishnah, held their meetings in the temple; (2) the second, or intermediate Court of Appeal being in the Court of the Priests (probably close to the Nicanor Gate); and (3) the highest that of the Great Sanhedrin, at one time in the "Hall of Hewn Square Stones."

Passing out of these "colonnades" or "porches" you entered the "Court of the Gentiles" or what the Rabbis called "the Mount of the House," which was the widest on the west side, and the more and more narrow respectively on the east, south, and north. This was called the profane place to which Gentiles had access. Here also must have been the market for the sale of sacrificial animals, the tables of the money-changers, and places for the sale of other needful articles. Advancing within this court, you reached a low breast-wall which marked the space beyond which no Gentile, nor Levitically unclean person might proceed--tablets which bore inscriptions to that effect warned them off. Thirteen openings admitted into the inner part of the Court. Then there were fourteen steps which led up to the Terrace, which was bounded by the wall of the temple-building in the stricter sense. A flight of steps led up to the massive, splendid gates. The two on the west side seem to have been of no importance as far as the worshipers were concerned, and probably intended for the use of workmen. North and south were four gates. But the most splendid gate was that to the east, called the "Beautiful."

Entering by the "Beautiful" gate one would come into the Court of Women, called such because the women occupied within it two elevated and separated galleries, which filled only part of the Court. Fifteen steps led up to the Upper Court, which was bounded by a wall, and where was located the Nicanor Gate, covered with Corinthian brass. Here the Levites, who conducted the musical part of the service were placed. In the Court of the Women were the treasury and the thirteen "trumpets" while at each corner were chambers or halls, destined for various purposes. Beyond the fifteen steps there were repositories for musical instruments. The Upper Court was divided into two parts by a boundary--the narrow part forming the Court of Israel, and the wider the Court of Priests, in which was the great Altar and the Laver.

The sanctuary itself was on a higher terrace than the Court of the Priests. Twelve steps led up to its Porch, which extended beyond it on either side (north and south). Here, in separate chambers, all that was necessary for the sacrificial service was kept. On two marble tables near the entrance the old shewbread which was taken out, and the new that was brought in were respectively placed. The Porch was adorned with a massive golden vine. A two-leaved gate opened into the sanctuary itself which was divided into two parts. The Holy Place had the Golden Candlestick (on the south), the Table of Shewbread (on the north), and the Golden Altar of Incense between them. A heavy double veil concealed the entrance to the Most Holy Place, which in the second Temple was empty, nothing being there but the piece of rock, called the Foundation Stone which, according to tradition, covered the mouth of the pit on which it was thought the world was founded. Nor does all this convey an adequate idea of the vastness of the Temple buildings. For all around the Sanctuary and each of the Courts were various chambers and out-buildings which served different purposes connected with the services of the

temple.

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6. Read Luke 2:48-50
(1) No references

Luke 2:48-50

- 48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him,
"Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you
with great anxiety."
49 And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I
must be in my Father's house?"
50 But they did not understand what he said to them.

Verse 48:

[they are astonished](#) -- The Greek words for this phrase indicate that Joseph and Mary "were struck out" by what they saw and heard. They had never perceived the power within this child. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 49:

It was here that Jesus felt himself at home, breathing his own proper air. His words convey a gentle rebuke of their obtuseness in requiring him to explain his actions. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

It was natural for Mary to be the first to speak. The mother's reproach of her son is followed by a confession of negligence on her part and of Joseph. The Greek idiom used here expresses Jesus' amazement that his parents should not know that there was only one possible place in Jerusalem for him. Exactly when Jesus first became conscious of his peculiar relation to his Father in heaven we do not know. But he has it now at twelve, and it will grow within him through the years ahead in Nazareth. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

The phrase [I must be in my Father's house](#) can also be translated, "I must be about my Father's work." In either translation, Jesus refers to God as his Father. His divine sonship, and his obedience to his heavenly Father's will, will take precedence over his ties to his family. (NAB)

[in my Father's house](#) -- The Greek can also be translated "about my Father's business." This second translation is favored by the Greek construction in such texts as Matthew 16:23; John 8:29; 9:4; and 14:31. The phrase implies a close personal relationship between Jesus and the Father. The addition of the word "house" accords with the immediate situation and is supported by the interpretation of the early Fathers (see also Genesis 41:51 and Esther 7:9). This interpretation also fits in with the main thrust of Luke, where the climactic moment is reached in the Jerusalem Temple, not only in the Infancy narrative, but also at the end (19:45). By way of foreshadowing, the infancy narrative ends where the Gospel will end. Mary finds Jesus at his work; he is not simply her son, but the Heavenly Father's Son, sent on a mission in which she finds him totally involved; at this she sorrows, for it means separation. The words "my Father" are a sharp reversal; up until now Joseph was called by that title. (JBC)

Verse 50:

Even Mary with all her previous preparation and brooding was not equal to the dawning of the Messianic consciousness in her child. Jesus had virtually said, "My Father is God, and I must be in His house." (Internet--Crosswalk site)

It is possible that Jesus had never expressly said as much about his relation to His Father in Heaven until now, and so he confounded Mary and Joseph with his words. It was perhaps the true interpretation of many things which they had already witnessed from him at their home. Henceforth, he went down with them and was subject to them. The marvel of this condescension lies in its coming after such a scene, and such an assertion of his higher sonship; his words are evidently meant to convey this. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[they did not understand](#) -- that is, neither Joseph nor Mary. One of a parent's greatest sorrows afflicts Mary--the inability to understand her own child. This statement makes it highly improbable that Mary appreciated the divine sonship of her son at this time. (JBC)

Jesus' parents were astonished. His mother expressed their anxiety by words of inquiry and rebuke that were greeted with surprise by the Christ child. Why should they not have known where to find him? In his first recorded words Jesus spoke of God as "my Father" in a sense that distinguished this relationship from one that was open to all, and his parents did not understand the saying. (IB)

Summary from LToJC:

In some part of this temple, we must look for the child "sitting in the midst of the doctors" both hearing them and asking them questions, on the third and the two following days of the Feast on which he first visited the sanctuary. Only on the first two days of the Feast of Passover was personal attendance in the temple necessary. With the third day began the commencement of the so-called half-holydays when it was lawful to return to one's home. This was a provision which no doubt many took to their advantage. The Passover had been eaten, the festive sacrifice offered, and the first ripe barley, reaped and brought to the temple, waved as an Omer of first-flour before the Lord. In the Gospel narrative "when they had fulfilled the days" cannot necessarily imply that Joseph and Mary had remained in Jerusalem during the whole Paschal week. On the other hand, circumstances connected with the presence of Jesus in the Temple render this supposition impossible. Jesus could not have been found among the Doctors after the close of the feast. Where in the temple could Jesus have been at this time?

It has been commonly supposed that there was a synagogue in the temple, but there is no historical evidence to confirm this. Even if one had been in existence, the worship and addresses of the synagogue would have not offered any opportunity for the questioning on the part of Jesus which the narrative implies. Still more groundless is the idea that there was in the temple something like a theological academy, not to speak of the circumstance that a child of twelve would not at any time have been allowed to take part in its discussions. But there were occasions on which the temple became virtually, although not formally, an academy. We read in the Talmud that the members of the temple Sanhedrin, who on ordinary days sat as a Court of Appeals, from the close of the morning to the time of the evening sacrifice would often, on Sabbath and feast days, come out on the terrace of the temple, and teach there. In such popular instruction the

utmost latitude of questioning would be given. It is in this audience, which sat on the ground, surrounded and mingling with the doctors, and therefore during, and not after the feast, that we must seek the child Jesus.

The presence and questioning of a child of that age did not necessarily imply anything extraordinary to convey the idea of supernaturalness to the doctors or others in the audience. Jewish tradition gives other instances of precocious and strangely advanced students. Besides, scientific theological learning would not be necessary to take part in such popular discussions. The lectures addressed to such a general audience would be of a very different character than those of the scientific students.

If there was nothing so unprecedented as to render His Presence and questioning marvelous, all who heard him were amazed at his insight in combining ideas, and discerning answers. We can only infer that the discussion might have been connected with the Paschal solemnities, since grave Paschal questions did arise. Or perhaps the child Jesus led up to this type of question through his own questions into the deeper meaning of the Paschal solemnities.

A question we might ask ourselves is whether or not Mary had told Jesus about the history of his infancy, or of what had happened when for the first time he had been brought to the temple during his Presentation. He may have been so entirely absorbed by the awakening thought of his being and mission, however it was kindled, as to be not only neglectful but forgetful of all around. It even seemed to him impossible to understand how they could have sought him, and not known where he had lingered. We may venture to say, that he now realized that this was emphatically His Father's House. It may have been then and there, for the very first time, that he felt the strong and irresistible impulse--that divine necessity of being--to be about His Father's business.

That forgetfulness of his child-life was a sacrifice--a sacrifice of self; that entire absorption in his Father's business, without a thought of self, either in the gratification of curiosity, the acquisition of knowledge, or personal ambition--a consecration of himself to God. It was the first manifestation of his passive and active obedience to the will of God.

What we have already learned of his history, we do not wonder that the answer of Jesus came to his parents as a fresh surprise. Each fresh manifestation came to Mary as something separate and new--not as a part of a whole. For the true development of the God-Man, what was the natural was also the needful process, even as it was best for the learning of Mary herself, and for the future reception of his teaching. The Virgin Mother's ignorance of her Son's true character was necessary for his achievement of a human life, otherwise she could never have been an earthly mother to him. It was necessary that there be a gradual revelation; it was necessary that he develop his own consciousness; and it was necessary that his parents give him a proper human training, which they never could have done if they knew he was the essential Son of God.

With his return to Nazareth, Jesus life as a youth and his early manhood began, with all the inward and outward development of heavenly and earthly approbation which it carried. It was in Nazareth that Jesus increased in favor with God and man.

7. Read Luke 2:51
- (1) Luke 2:19

8. Read Luke 2:52

(1) I Samuel 2:26

(3) Luke 2:40

(2) Luke 1:60

Luke 2:51-52

51 He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.

52 And Jesus advanced (in) wisdom and age and favor before God and man.

Verse 51:

Jesus continued subject to Joseph and Mary's training of him. This wonderful child who really knew more than parents and rabbis, this gently, obedient, and affectionate boy. The next eighteen years at Nazareth (Luke 3:23) he remained, growing into manhood and becoming the carpenter of Nazareth (Mark 6:3) in succession to Joseph (Matthew 13:55) who is mentioned here for the last time. Mary kept pondering and comparing all the things. But could she foresee how destiny would take Jesus out beyond her mother's reach? (Internet--Crosswalk site)

was obedient to them -- This last reference to Joseph in the Gospels is a beautiful tribute to him. Obedient to his guidance, Jesus grew to perfect manhood. (JBC)

Jesus consciousness that he was the Son of God did not interfere in any way with his filial duties on the human level. (IB)

Verse 52:

Advanced in wisdom and stature. He kept cutting his way forward as through a jungle as pioneers did. He kept growing in stature and in wisdom. His physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual development was perfect. At each stage he was perfect for that particular stage. It is ideal manhood to have such favor of God and men. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Jesus advanced in wisdom -- Luke stresses Jesus' connatural condition. He grew as any boy would. (JBC)

Some versions read "Jesus advanced in wisdom, and **in physical stature**. The Greek could also mean "age" as in the NAB version, but this idea seems like a needless repetition of meaning. (JBC)

and in grace -- means loveliness in the sight of God and mankind, including not only spiritual holiness but graciousness, tact, charm, and attractiveness. Jesus grew in all ways--physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually -- for the work that lay ahead of him. (JBC)

SESSION 11

As you could probably tell from your study guide this is a rather lengthy session. I will be giving quite a bit of historical background on the times intermixed with the scriptural comments. Therefore, we may find it necessary to break this session into two parts. For the moment, let's concentrate on an overview of the times:

Overview of the times:

There is something grand in the almost absolute silence which lies upon the thirty years between the Birth and the first Messianic manifestation of Jesus. What has preceded concerned only the inner history of Jesus and the preparation of the Christ. At last that solemn silence was broken by an appearance, a proclamation, a rite, and a ministry as startling as that of Elijah had been. In many respects the two messengers and their times bore singular likeness. It was to a society secure, prosperous, and luxurious, and to a religious community which presented the appearance of hopeless perversion, and yet contained the germs of a possible regeneration, that both Elijah and John the Baptist came. Both suddenly appeared to threaten terrible judgment, but also to open unthought of possibilities of good. And as if to deepen still more this impression, both appeared in a manner unexpected, and even diametrically opposed to the habits of their contemporaries. John came suddenly out of the wilderness, as Elijah did from the wilds of Gilead. John bore the same strange ascetic appearance as his predecessor. The message of John was the counterpart of that of Elijah. His baptism was that of Elijah's rite on Mount Carmel. Even the more minute details surrounding the life of Elijah found their counterpart in that of John. Yet, history never repeats itself; rather, it fulfills in its development that of which it gave indication at its beginning. Therefore, the history of John the Baptist was the fulfillment of that of Elijah in the fullness of time.

In the Roman world and in Palestine, the time had fully come; not in the sense of any special expectancy, but of absolute need. The reign of Augustus marked, not only the climax, but the crisis, of Roman history. Whatever of good or of evil the ancient world contained, it had become fully ripe. As regarded politics, philosophy, religion, and society, the utmost limits had been reached. The only alternatives beyond them lay in ruin or in regeneration. It was felt that the boundaries of the Empire could be extended no further. Henceforth the highest aim must be to preserve what had been conquered. The destiny of Rome was in the hands of one man only, who was at the same time general-in-chief of a standing army of about three hundred and forty thousand men, head of a Senate, and High-Priest of a religion. At this time the Senate had sunk into a mere court for registering the commands of Caesar, and the religion's highest expression was the transformation of the state into the person of the Emperor as a god. All power within, without, and above lay in his hands. Within the city were side by side the most abject misery and almost boundless luxury. Of a population of about two million, one-half were slaves, and the rest consisted of either freedmen and their descendants, or of foreigners. Each class contributed its share to the common decay. Slavery was not even what we know of it--rather, it was a seething mass of cruelty and oppression on one side, and of cunning and corruption on the other. More than any other cause, it contributed to the ruin of Roman society. The freedmen (who had often acquired their freedom by the most disreputable courses, and had even prospered in them) combined in shameless manner the

vices of the free with the vileness of the slave. The foreigners (especially the Greeks and Syrians) who crowded the city, poisoned the springs of life by the corruption which they brought. The free citizens were idle, dissipated, and sunken--their chief thoughts were of the theater and the arena, and they were mostly supported at the public cost. Even in the time of Augustus, more than two hundred thousand persons were maintained by the State. What of the old Roman stock remained was rapidly decaying, partly from corruption, but mainly from the increasing cessation of marriage, and the nameless abominations of what remained of family-life.

The state of the provinces was in every respect more favorable. It was the settled policy of the Empire to destroy all separate nationalities, or rather to absorb and to Grecianize them all. The only real resistance came from the Jews. Their stubbornness (tenacity) was found in their religion, and even in its extreme intolerant exclusiveness, served a most important Providential purpose. So Rome became to all the center of attraction, but it also consisted of fast spreading destructive corruption. Within the common bond of the Greek language, the unity served another important Providential purpose. In another direction so did the conscious despair of any possible internal reformation. It seemed the last word of all the institutions in the Roman world to say: "It is not in me!" Religion, philosophy, and society had passed through every stage to that of despair. Without tracing the various phases of ancient thought it may be generally said that, at least in Rome the issue lay between Stoicism and Epicureanism. The Stoics flattered their pride; while the Epicureans gratified their sensuality. The one was in accordance with the original national pride, while the other was in the midst of decay and corruption. Both ultimately led to atheism and despair--the Stoics by turning all higher aspirations self-ward while the Epicureans quenched their higher aspirations in the enjoyment of the moment; the one by making the extinction of all feeling and self-deification, while the other made the indulgence of every passion and the worship of matter its ideal.

Under such conditions all real belief in a personal continuance after death must have ceased among the educated classes. The older Stoics believed that the soul would continue for some time in a separate existence after death. In the case of sages it was until the general destruction of the world by fire, then the soul would return to the world-soul of which it was a part. Even this hope was beset by so many doubts and misgivings as to make it practically without influence or comfort. Cicero was the only one who, following Plato, defended the immortality of the soul, while the Peripatetics denied the existence of the soul, and leading Stoics denied the continuance of the soul after death. Yet even Cicero writes as one who is overwhelmed by doubts. With his contemporaries this doubt deepened into absolute despair, the only comfort lying in present indulgences of the passions. The Greeks were most tenacious of belief in the non-extinction of the individual, but even among them the practical upshot was the same. The only healthier tendency, although mixed with error, came from the Neo-Platonic School which accordingly offered a point of contact between ancient philosophy and the new faith.

In circumstances such as this, anything like real religion was manifestly impossible. Rome tolerated and incorporated all national rites. But among the population religion had degenerated into abject superstition. In the East much of religion consisted of the vilest rites while among the philosophers, all religions were considered

equally false or equally true--the outcome of ignorance, or else the unconscious modifications of some fundamental thought. The only religion on which the State insisted was the deification and worship of the Emperor. Soon not only the Emperors, but their wives, paramours, children, and the creatures of their vilest lusts were deified--any private person might attain that distinction, if the survivors possessed sufficient means. Mingled with all this was an increasing amount of superstition: they feared religion because some understood it as the worship of foreign gods. The ancient Roman religion had long given place to foreign rites, the more mysterious and unintelligible the more enticing. It was thus that Judaism made its converts in Rome. Its chief recommendation with many was its being in contrast to the old, and the unknown possibilities which its seemingly incredible doctrines opened. Among the most repulsive symptoms of the general religious decay may be reckoned the prayers for the death of a rich relative, or even for the satisfaction of unnatural lusts, along with horrible blasphemies when such prayers remained unanswered.

It would be unsavory to describe just how far the worship of indecency was carried out. Public morals were corrupted by the mimic representations of everything vile, and even by the pandering of a corrupt art. The personation of gods, oracles, divination, dreams, astrology, magic, necromancy, and superstitious divine intervention, all contributed to the general decay. It has been said that the idea of conscience as we understand it was unknown to heathenism. Absolute right did not exist. Might was right. The social relations exhibited even deeper corruption. The sanctity of marriage had ceased. Female dissipation and the general dissoluteness led at last to an almost entire cessation of marriage. Abortion, and the exposure and murder of newly-born children, were common and tolerated. Unnatural vices, which even the greatest philosophers practiced, if not advocated, attained proportions which defy description.

But among these sad signs of the times three must be especially mentioned: the treatment of slaves, the bearing towards the poor, and public amusements. The slave was entirely unprotected--males and females were exposed to nameless cruelties, compared to which death by being thrown to the wild beasts, or fighting in the arena, might seem like an absolute relief. Sick or old slaves were cast out to perish from want. But what the influence of the slaves must have been on the free population, and especially among the young (whose tutors they usually were) may readily be imagined. The heartlessness towards the poor who crowded the city is another well-known feature of ancient Roman society. Of course, there was neither hospitals, nor provision for the poor. Charity and brotherly love in their every manifestation are purely Old and New Testament ideas. Even the bestowal of the smallest alms on the needy was regarded as very questionable behavior. It was best not to afford them the means of protracting a meaningless existence. All manual labor, except for agriculture, was looked upon with utmost contempt. The account which Seneca has to give of what occupied and amused the idle multitude horrified even himself. And so the only escape which remained for the philosopher, the satiated, or the miserable seemed to come in the form of self-destruction. What is worse, the noblest spirits of the time felt that the state of things was utterly hopeless. Society could not reform itself. Philosophy and religion had nothing to offer. They had all been tried and found wanting. Seneca longed for some hand from without to lift up from the mire of despair; Cicero pictured the enthusiasm which would greet the

embodiment of true virtue, should it ever appear on earth; Tacitus declared human life one great farce, and expressed his conviction that the Roman world lay under some terrible curse. All around there was despair, conscious need, and unconscious longing.

Can any greater contrast be imagined, than the proclamation of a coming kingdom of God amid such a world? Or could there have been any clearer evidence of the reality of this divine message--that it came to seek and to save those which were lost? One synchronism, as remarkable as that of the Star of the East and the Birth of the Messiah here claims the reverent attention of the student of history. On the 19th of December, 69 A.D. the Roman Capital with its ancient sanctuaries was set on fire. Eight months later, on the 9th day of the Jewish month of Ab in 70 A.D. the Temple of Jerusalem was given to the flames. It is not a coincidence but a conjunction, for upon the ruins of heathenism and of apostate Judaism the Christian church was to be reared.

B. INTRODUCTION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD -- 26 - 27 AD

1. PRESENTATION OF JESUS THE KING -- 26 AD

a. Forerunner of Jesus

1. Read Luke 3:1-6 entirely through one time.
2. Read Luke 3:1
 - (1) No references
3. Read Luke 3:2
 - (1) Luke 1:80
4. Read Luke 3:3
 - (1) Acts 13:24
 - (2) Acts 19:4
5. Read Luke 3:4
 - (1) Isaiah 40:3-5
6. Read Luke 3:5-6
 - (1) No references

Luke 3:1-6

- 1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene,
- 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert.
- 3 He went throughout (the) whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,

- 4 as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one
crying out in the desert: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.
5 Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The
winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth,
6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

Overview from IB:

In accordance with Greek literary custom and also with good OT precedent, Luke synchronizes his story with the political and ecclesiastical history of its times as will be seen shortly when we enunciate each name and place mentioned in the text.

Verse 1:

Luke makes a six-fold attempt to indicate the time when John the Baptist began his ministry. He revived the function of the prophet and it was a momentous event after centuries of prophetic silence. The ancients did not have our modern system of chronology, the names of the rulers as is here was the common method of dating events. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Tiberius Caesar -- Tiberius succeeded Augustus as emperor in 14 A.D. and reigned until 37 A.D. The 15th year of his reign would have fallen between 27 and 29 A.D. (NAB) Tiberius was ruler in the provinces two years before Augustus Caesar died. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar -- This is the most precise, chronological reference in all the Gospels for dating the ministry of Jesus. Although coregent from 11 to 12 A.D., Tiberius succeeded Augustus as sole emperor only on August 19, 14 A.D. and he reigned until 37 A.D. The fifteenth year of his reign is 28-29 A.D. according to Roman computation; but Luke possibly used the Syrian method, which counted the interval between August 19 and the beginning of the new year (Oct. 1) as the first regnal year. In that case, the fifteenth year extended from Oct. 1, 27 until Oct. 1, 28. Jesus was, therefore, baptized toward the end of the year 27 A.D. (JBC)

Pontius Pilate -- prefect of Judea from 26 A.D. to 36 A.D. The Jewish historian Josephus describes him as a greedy and ruthless prefect who had little regard for the local Jewish population and their religious practices (see Luke 13:1). (NAB)

He was the "procurator" or "prefect" of Judea and not really the "governor" during the years 26 through 36 A.D. (JBC)

Herod -- that is, Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. He ruled over Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. to 39 A.D. His official title tetrarch means literally, "ruler of a quarter," but it came to designate any subordinate prince. (NAB)

This is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great by Malthace. He ruled as tetrarch over Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. until 39 A.D. (JBC)

Philip -- also a son of Herod the Great, tetrarch of the territory to the north and east of the Sea of Galilee from 4 B.C. to 34 A.D. Only two small areas of this territory are mentioned by Luke. (NAB)

Philip was the son of Herod the Great by Cleopatra of Jerusalem, and he was by far the most sincere and upright of Herod's children. At Herod's death he became ruler of Batanea, Trachonitis, Auranitis, and a certain portion of the domain of Zenodorus. (JBC)

This Philip was a different and very superior Philip to the one whose wife Herodias went to live with Herod Antipas (Mark 6:17). (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[Lysanius](#) -- nothing is known about this person who is said here to have been tetrarch of Abilene, a territory northwest of Damascus. (NAB)

[Ituaria](#) -- located to the northeast of Palestine; in antiquity, it belonged to the half tribe of Manasseh. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[Trachonitis](#) -- located farther northeast, between Ituria and Damascus. It was a rocky district, infested with robbers, and committed by Augustus to Herod the Great to keep order. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[Abilene](#) -- located even more to the northeast; it was eighteen miles from Damascus. (Internet -- Crosswalk site)

No other chronological precision is to be found elsewhere in the NT, and it comes from Luke who claims as the peculiar recommendation of his Gospel, that he had “accurately traced down all things from the first.” Even our Lord’s own age can be determined from this Gospel (Luke 3:23). The fifteenth year of Tiberius’ reign would be reckoned from the period when he was admitted, three years before the death of Augustus, to a share of the empire. Pontius Pilate is mentioned as governor of Judea although his proper title was that of procurator, yet with more than the usual powers of that office. After holding it for about ten years he was ordered to Rome, to answer to charges brought against him. Shortly after his arrival in Rome, Tiberius died (35 A.D.), and soon thereafter Pilate committed suicide. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 2:

Matthew describes John as the Baptist while Mark describes him as the Baptizer. No other Gospel mentions Zecharias. Mark begins his gospel here, but Matthew and Luke have two infancy chapters before John appears as the Baptizer. Luke alone tells of the coming of the word to John. All three synoptists locate him “in the wilderness” as found here in Luke. In his account Matthew adds to “in the wilderness” the location “of Judea.” (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiphas](#) -- after the call of John the Baptist (in terms of the civil rulers of the period) Luke now mentions the religious leadership of Palestine. Annas had been high priest from 6 to 15 A.D. After being deposed by the Romans in 15 A.D. he was succeeded by various members of his family and eventually by his son-in-law Caiphas, who was high priest from 28 to 36 A.D. Luke refers to Annas as high priest at the time (but see John 18:13, and 19), possibly because of the continuing influence of Annas or because the title continued to be used for ex-high-priest. (NAB)

Annas had held the office of high priest from 6 to 15 A.D., but his dominant influence insured the appointment to this office of five sons, one son-in-law (Caiphas, 18-36 A.D.), and one grandson (Matthias, 65 A.D.) All in all, this list of names draws a gloomy picture. Tiberius by this time was in semi-retirement on Capri, and the affairs of state were in the grip of the unscrupulous Sejanus until 31 A.D. Palestine was arbitrarily divided by Rome, and the high-priesthood was granted to the scheming family of Annas. This reminds us of Judges 2:18: “It was thus the Lord took pity on their distressful cries of affliction under their oppressors.” (JBC)

[Annas and Caiphas](#) -- both are called “high priests”. Although deposed, Annas

retained much of his influence, and probably, as deputy, exercised much of the power of the high priesthood along with Caiaphas (John 18:13; Acts 4:6). Both Zadok and Abiathar acted as high priests in David's time (II Samuel 15:35), and it seems to have become the fixed practice to have two (II Kings 25:18). (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Jewish practice had been to appoint the high priest for life, but in Roman times his tenure of office was limited, perhaps because the Romans disliked to see so much power concentrated in the hands of one man. The office of high priest was held by members of Annas' immediate family for fifty years after his official retirement. (IB)

[the word of God came to John](#) -- Luke is the only writer in the NT who associates the preaching of John with a call from God. Luke is thereby identifying John with the prophets whose ministries began with similar calls. In Luke 7:26 John will be described as "more than a prophet"; he is also the precursor of Jesus (Luke 7:27), a transitional figure inaugurating the period of the fulfillment of prophecy and promise. (NAB)

Luke calls special attention to John's continuation of the role of Jeremiah: Consecrated before birth (Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:13), he announces eschatological judgment (Jeremiah 1:10; 25; Luke 3:9, 16f.), messianic glory (Jeremiah 31; Luke 1:14; 3:15f), and the new and final covenant available even to the least important of men (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 7:18-23). In the notice "son of Zechariah" we detect a point of contact between the major part of Luke and the Infancy narrative. (JBC)

[in the desert of Judea](#) -- Here we have another connecting link with the infancy narrative (1:80); both references leave the topography rather vague: 1:80 has simply "in desert areas." Here "the desert of Judea" means the semi-mountainous, bleak wilderness rising between the Dead Sea and the central mountain ridge. The Jordan Valley cannot properly be called a desert, especially that around Jericho, the traditional spot where John is said to have baptized. John 3:23 states that John was baptizing in the north. Luke must here be combining geography and theology. The OT contains a tradition of desert spirituality; it signifies the place to which God led Israel, and, alone with his people formed a covenant or marriage bond with them (Jeremiah 2:2f.; Deuteronomy 2:7; 32:10; Ezekiel 16). The Qumran covenanters also went out "into the desert" that they might be thoroughly consecrated to God and be made ready for the final eschatological war. (JBC)

Presumably, "in the wilderness" is a reference to the barren and sparsely populated lower Jordan Valley rather than to the rocky wasteland west of the Dead Sea. (IB)

The word "preaching" envisages an initial proclamation to non-Christians; another word, "teaching", imparts a deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ and is reserved for instruction given by Christ in the Gospels. (JBC)

"Baptism" was a ceremonial purification by water that has deep roots in biblical tradition. The Qumran covenanters, living near the spot where John baptized, built an elaborate water system in their community house in order to provide for their many lustrations. The Mishnah legislates for baptism along with sacrifice (and for males, circumcision) in the reception of gentile converts. John's baptism differed from Jewish proselyte baptism in that it was administered to Israelites, and it differed from Qumran purification in that it was given once for all time to soldiers, to publicans, and to sinners, who were not usually accepted in full communion with God's people. The prophetic, eschatological aspects of John's baptism can possibly be traced to texts like Isaiah 1:16;

Jeremiah 4:14; Ezekiel 36:25; and Zechariah 13:1. (JBC)

In Greek *metanoia* denotes “repentance” after some misdemeanor. In the LXX, it almost always translates the Hebrew *niham* (to be sorry, be moved interiorly with sorrow or pity [Jeremiah 18:8; Amos 7:3, 6]). Later Greek translators of the OT as well as Hellenistic Jewish literature employed *metanoia* to translate *sub* (a return; for example, Isaiah 31:6; 53:7; Jeremiah 18:8; Ezekiel 33:12; Sirach 48:15). This Jewish background of *metanoia* focuses attention on the deeply interior quality of repentance. For the synoptists some kind of interior renewal must accompany the forgiveness of sins. (JBC)
Verse 3:

The wilderness was John’s abode so that he began preaching where he was. It was the plain (Genesis 13:10) or the valley of the Jordan, El Ghor, as far north as Succoth (II Chronicles 4:17). Sometimes he was on the eastern bank of the Jordan (John 10:40), though usually he was on the west side. His baptizing kept him near the river. The baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins is the same phrase as in Mark 4:1. The word “remission” or its counterpart “forgiveness” occurs in Luke more frequently than in all the other NT writers combined. In medical writings the word is used for the relaxing of disease. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 4:

John the Baptist is introduced with the words of Isaiah 40:3-5 which is the identical phrase with which the Dead Sea covenanters explained their way of life. Whereas John prepares for the way of the Lord, whom the Evangelist knew to be Jesus, the Dead Sea covenanters explain: “This means studying the Torah which He commanded through Moses.” Slightly different from the NT and the LXX, the Hebrew text of Isaiah 30:3 connects the phrase “in the desert” with the second member: “A voice cries out: ‘In the desert prepare the way of the Lord.’” The NT also changes the final words of the next line to read “make straight his paths” instead of “the paths of our God” (MT), so that the reference is more clearly to Jesus. Isaiah was describing the return from the Babylonian exile as a new Exodus, leading across another Sinai desert to a new and more glorious promised land (Isaiah 41:17-20; 43:1f., 14-21). John the Baptist is depicted as realizing the dreams of Isaiah. Luke will point out that the “desert” will be the trials of Jesus’ suffering and death, and that the promised land and the new Jerusalem will be gained through Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. (JBC)

The same phrase “Isaiah the prophet” is use in Mark 1:2 and Matthew 3:3. In addition, Mark adds a quotation from Malachi 3:1 and Luke gives Isaiah 40:4-5 that are not in Matthew or Mark (Luke 3:5-6). (Internet --Crosswalk site)

The Essenes from Qumran used the same passage to explain why their community was in the desert studying and observing the law and the prophets (Dead Sea Scrolls). (NAB)

Verse 5:

valley -- is a ravine or valley hedged in by precipices.

shall be filled -- In 1845 when the Sultan visited Brusa the inhabitants were called out to clear the roads of rocks and to fill up the hollows. Oriental monarchs often did this very thing. A royal courier would go ahead to issue the call. So the Messiah sends his herald (John) before him to prepare the way for him. Isaiah described the preparation for the Lord’s triumphal march, and John used it with great force. (Internet--Crosswalk

site)

Verse 6:

This phrase aptly describes Luke's Gospel which has in mind the message of Christ for all men. It is the universal Gospel. (Internet-Crosswalk site) The idea behind verses 5 and 6 is that every obstruction shall be removed so as to reveal to the whole world the Salvation of God in Jesus. (compare Psalm 98:3; Isaiah 1:10; 49:6; 52:10; Luke 2:32 & 32; Acts 13:47). (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Luke stresses here the universal scope of Jesus' salvation. (JBC)

Summary from JBC:

Luke was composed after Mark and Matthew, and he manifests suspicion against an early attempt in early Christianity to make the Baptist a rival or even an open opponent of Jesus. The Gospel of John will be most explicit in pointing out that the Baptist is not the Messiah. Both Matthew and Luke depended upon the same source of collective sayings (the Q source), and when we compare the two we find that: (1) Luke omits John the Baptist's announcement that the Kingdom of God is close at hand (Matthew 3:2) and reserves this statement for Jesus (Luke 10:9, 11). (2) Luke suppresses the description of the Baptist in the role of Elijah (Matthew 3:4 = Mark 1:6) and an account of the Baptist's activity, especially his baptizing (Matthew 3:5f.). (3) In the statement, "There is coming one after me, mightier than I" (Mark 1:7; Matthew 3:11), Luke removes the words "after me," lest Jesus be considered a disciple of the Baptist or even an intimate friend. Luke considers John the last and greatest prophet of Israel, but clearly distinct from the glorious Messianic moment that begins with Jesus (Luke 16:16; Acts 13:24f.) where it is stated that John came "before his (Jesus') entrance".

7. Read Matthew 3:1-6 entirely through one time.
8. Read Matthew 3:1
(1) No references
9. Read Matthew 3:2
(1) Matthew 4:17 (2) Matthew 10:7
10. Read Matthew 3:3
(1) Isaiah 40:3 (2) John 1:31--34
11. Read Matthew 3:4-6
(1) No references

Matthew 3:1-6

- 1 In those days John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea
- 2 (and) saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"
- 3 It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: "A voice of one

- crying out in the desert, 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.'" 4 John wore clothing made of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. 5 At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him 6 and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

Verse 1:

Matthew does not indicate the date when John first appeared as Luke does. It was some thirty years after the birth of John, precisely how long after the return of Joseph and Mary to Nazareth we do not know. The Jews probably had proselyte baptism, but this particular rite was meant for the Gentiles who accepted Judaism. John is treating the Jews as Gentiles in demanding baptism at their hands on the basis of repentance. The "wilderness of Judea" was the rough region in the hills toward the Jordan and the Dead Sea. There were some people scattered over the barren cliffs. Here John came in close touch with the rocks, the trees, the goats, the sheep, and the shepherds, the snakes that slipped before the burning grass over the rocks. He was the Baptizer, but he was also the Preacher, heralding his message out in the barren hills at first where few people were, but soon his startling message drew crowds from far and near. There are some preachers today who start with crowds, but then drive them away. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[In those days](#) -- is indicative of Christ's secluded life at Nazareth where Matthew's last chapter ended. When John the Baptist first came preaching was probably about six months before Jesus appeared. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Unlike Luke, Matthew mentions nothing of the Baptist's origins and does not make him a relative of Jesus. (NAB)

[the desert of Judea](#) -- the barren region west of the Dead Sea extending up the Jordan Valley. (NAB)

The desert valley of the Jordan was sparsely peopled and bare in pasture. It is a little north of Jerusalem. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 2:

[Repent](#) -- the Baptist calls for a change of heart and conduct, a turning of one's life from rebellion to obedience towards God. (NAB)

Repent is the worst translation in the NT of what the actual word used means. The trouble is that the English word "repent" means "to be sorry again." John did not call on the people to be sorry, but to change (think afterwards) their mental attitudes (metanoia) and conduct. This is John's great word, but it has been hopelessly mistranslated. The tragedy of it is that we have no one English word that reproduces exactly the meaning and the atmosphere of the Greek word. The Greek has a word meaning to be sorry (metamelomai) which is exactly our English word "repent" and it is used of Judas (Matthew 27:3). John was a new prophet with the call of the old prophets: "Turn ye" (Joel 2:12; Isaiah 55:7; Ezekiel 33:11, 15). (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[the kingdom of heaven is at hand](#) -- "heaven" (literally, "the heavens") is a substitute for the name "God" that was avoided by devout Jews of the time out of reverence. The expression "kingdom of heaven" occurs only in the Gospel of Matthew. It means the effective rule of God over his people. In its fullness it includes not only

human obedience to God's word, but the triumph of God over physical evils, supremely over death. In the expectation found in Jewish apocalyptic, the kingdom was to be ushered in by a judgment in which sinners would be condemned and perish, an expectation that was shared by the Baptist. This was modified in Christian understanding where the kingdom was seen as being established in stages, culminating in the parousia of Jesus. (NAB)

[for the kingdom of heaven is at hand](#) -- this phrase suggests that of Daniel's grand vision of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of days, to receive his investiture in a world-wide kingdom (Daniel 7:13, 14). It was quoted to meet both the national expectations and to turn them into the right channel. A kingdom for which repentance was the proper preparation to be essentially spiritual. Deliverance from sin, the great blessing of Christ's kingdom (Matthew 1:21), can be valued by those only to whom sin is a burden (Matthew 9:12). John's great work, accordingly, was to awaken this feeling and hold out the hope of a speedy and precious remedy. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

It was a startling word that John thundered over the hills and it re-echoed throughout the land. The OT prophets had said that it would come some day in God's own time. John proclaims as the herald of the new day that it has come, has drawn near. How near he does not say, but he evidently means very near, so near that one could see the signs and the proof. He does not explain the words "the kingdom of heaven." The other Gospels use "the kingdom of God" as Matthew also does a few times, but he has "the kingdom of heaven" over thirty times. He means "the reign of God," not the political or ecclesiastical organization which the Pharisees expected. His words would be understood differently by different groups as is true of popular preachers. The current Jewish apocalypses had numerous eschatological ideas connected with the kingdom of heaven. It is not clear what sympathy John had with these eschatological features. He employs vivid language at times, but we do not have to confine John's intellectual and theological horizon to that of the rabbis of his day. He has been an original student of the OT in his wilderness environment without any necessary contact with the Essenes who dwelt there. His voice is a new one that strikes terror to the routine of the theology of the temple and of the synagogue. It is the fashion of some critics to deny to John any conception of the spiritual content of his words which is a wholly gratuitous criticism. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken](#) -- This is Matthew's way of interpreting the mission and message of the Baptist. He quotes Isaiah 40:3 where the prophet refers to the return of Israel from the exile, accompanied by their God. He applies it here to the work of John as ["A voice of one crying out in the desert ..."](#) for the people to make ready the way of the Lord who is now near. He was only a voice, but what a voice he was. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths](#) -- This prediction is quoted in all four Gospels, showing that it was regarded as a great outstanding one, and the predicted forerunner as the connecting link between the old and the new. Like the great ones of the earth, the Prince of peace was to have His immediate approach proclaimed and His way prepared; and the call here is a call to put out of the way whatever would obstruct His progress and hinder his complete triumph, whether those hindrances were

public or personal, outward or inward. Luke continues this quotation by saying “Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God”. Leveling and smoothing are the obvious figures whose sense is conveyed in the first words of the proclamation “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” The idea is that every obstruction shall be so removed as to reveal to the whole world the salvation of God in Jesus. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 4:

The clothing of John recalls the austere dress of the prophet Elijah (II Kings 1:8). The expectation of the return of Elijah from heaven to prepare Israel for the final manifestation of God’s kingdom was widespread, and according to Matthew this expectation was fulfilled in the Baptist’s ministry (Matthew 11:14; 17:11-13). (NAB)

Matthew introduces John by drawing a vivid sketch of his dress, his habit, and his food. In the wilderness it did not matter how one dressed as it would in the cities. It was probably a matter of necessity that he dressed as he did, not an affectation, though it was the garb of the original Elijah (II Kings 1:8), rough sackcloth woven from the hair of camels. John may even have consciously took Elijah as a model. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

John’s dress and diet, along with his shrill cry in the wilderness, would recall the stern days of Elijah. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 5:

[Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him](#) -- From the metropolitan center to the extremities of the Judean province the cry of this great preacher of repentance and herald of the approaching Messiah brought penitents and eager expectants. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 6:

[were being baptized by him](#) -- The tense of this phrase indicates the repetition of the act as the crowds from Judea and the surrounding country kept going out to him. In other words, it was a regular stream of people going forth. The movement of course was gradual. It began on a small scale and steadily grew until it reached colossal proportions. It was his office to bind them to a new life which was symbolized by immersion in water. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

This baptism was at once a public seal of their felt need of deliverance from sin, of their expectation of the coming Deliverer, and of their readiness to welcome Him when He appeared. The baptism itself startled, and was intended to startle, them. They were familiar enough with the baptism of proselytes from heathenism; but this baptism of Jews themselves was quite new and strange to them. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[they acknowledged their sins](#) -- Each was probably confessing just before baptism, an “open confession.” It was a never to be forgotten scene here in the Jordan. John was calling a nation to a new life. They came from all over Judea and even from the other side of the Jordan Gorge, Perea. Mark adds that eventually all of Jerusalem also came. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Ritual washing was practiced by various groups in Palestine between 150 B.C. and 250 A.D. John’s baptism may have been related to the purificatory washings of the Essenes at Qumran. (NAB)

12. Read Mark 1:2-6 entirely through one time
13. Read Mark 1:2
(1) Malachi 3:1
14. Read Mark 1:3
(1) Isaiah 40:3 (2) John 1:23
15. Read Mark 1:4-6
(1) No references

Mark 1:2-6

- 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way.
- 3 A voice of one crying out in the desert: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.'"
- 4 John (the) Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- 5 People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.
- 6 John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. 4 He fed on locusts and wild honey.

Verse 2:

[As it is written in Isaiah the prophet](#) -- The quotation actually begins in verse 3; verse 2 is an adapted form of Malachi 3:1. (JBC)

[Behold, I am sending my messenger](#) -- Identified as Elijah in Malachi 4:5, he is the one who is to come to purify Israel before the Day of Yahweh. The text is applicable to John only on the supposition that Jesus is now the *Kyrios* (the Christ); therefore John was his prophesied forerunner. Elsewhere John disclaims he is Elijah (John 1:21) and calls Jesus such (Matthew 11:3; 3:10-12). Moreover, Jesus finally makes the startling reversal of roles, stating that "he (John) is Elijah" (Matthew 11:14). A solution is that early in his ministry Jesus was taken to be Elijah, Yahweh's forerunner, perhaps on the basis of John's proclamation of the "one to come;" then later Jesus disclaimed the role of the fiery prophet in preference to one of mercy and forgiveness (Matthew 11:4-6). Then he transferred the title to John. (JBC)

The quotation comes from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Isaiah is mentioned as the chief of the prophets. It was common to combine quotations from the prophets in testimonials and chains of quotations. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

This verse reflects the early Christian view of John as the forerunner of Christ, the preparer of the way for him. (IB)

John's ministry is seen as God's prelude to the saving mission of his Son. (NAB)

Verse 3:

[A voice of one crying](#)-- Isaiah 40:3 is applied to John in the belief that Jesus is the Christ, whose way is being prepared. Mark thus records a Christian interpretation of the OT. (JBC)

God is coming to his people to deliver them from their captivity in Babylon. So the prophet cries like a voice in the wilderness to make ready for the coming of God. When the committee from the Sanhedrin came to ask John who he was, he used this very language of Isaiah (John 1:23). He was only a voice. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

[make straight his paths](#) -- Highways today well illustrate the wonderful Persian roads for the couriers of the king, and then for the king himself. The Roman Empire was knit together by roads, some of which survive today. John had a high and holy mission as the forerunner of the Messiah. (Internet -- Crosswalk site)

Verse 4:

There has been some questions raised concerning the way in which various verses in the Bible should be punctuated. We need to realize that there was no punctuation in the ancient manuscripts. Some scholars have viewed the entirety of verses 2-3 as an insertion into the Gospel, and have combined verse 1 with verse 4 to give the reading: "The beginning of the gospel ... was John." This may be the preferable way in understanding the text. The work of John the Baptizer was commonly viewed as the beginning of the Christian movement (Acts 10:37; 13:24; 19:4); and in its opening chapters, the Gospel of John presupposes a close connection between Jesus and the Baptist. (IB)

[baptism of repentance](#) -- is a Semitism, meaning "a baptism, which symbolized or expressed repentance." It followed upon repentance and signified cleansing from the sins that were repented of. Repentance is more than "penitence", or godly sorrow for sin. The Greek word *metanoia* means a complete change of mind, a new direction of will, an altered purpose of life--what the OT and later Jewish literature summed up in the Hebrew word meaning "turning" away from sin and "turning" to the Lord. In Jewish teaching, as well as in the OT, divine forgiveness follows at once upon human repentance; but the passage before us has been colored by Christian interpretation--John's baptism is viewed as sacramental. Some scholars think that "for the forgiveness of sins" has been introduced into the text under the influence of the later Christian view of baptism. (IB)

John's coming was an epoch (it was something very significant), not a mere event. His coming was in accordance with the prophetic picture. The coming of John the Baptizer was the real beginning of the spoken message about Christ. He is described as the baptizing one in the wilderness. The baptizing took place in the River Jordan (Mark 1:5,9) which was included in the general term "the wilderness" or the deserted region of Judea. John preached the baptism of repentance. He heralded a repentance kind of baptism, a baptism marked by repentance. He called upon the Jews to change their minds and to turn from their sins, "confessing their sins". The public confessions produced a profound impression as they would now. Certainly John did not mean that the baptism was the means of obtaining the forgiveness of their sins or necessary to the remission of sins. Probably "with reference to" is as good a translation here as is possible. The baptism was on the basis of the repentance and confession of sin and, as Paul later explained (Romans 6:4), was a picture of the death to sin and resurrection to new life in Christ. This symbol was already in use by the Jews for proselytes who became Jews. John is treating

the Jewish nation as pagans who need to repent, to confess their sins, and to come back to the kingdom of God. The baptism in the Jordan was the objective challenge to the people. (Internet -- Crosswalk site)

Verse 5:

[were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins](#) --

Both John's baptism and the confession of sins have parallels in the Dead Sea Scrolls (the Qumran community). (JBC)

The baptism by John had been a great religious movement in the days just before Jesus' ministry began. [baptized by him](#) -- means "in his presence" or "at his direction." Jewish baptism, and probably the earliest Christians, was self-administered. The people baptized themselves in his presence. The later Christian usage permits pouring in cases of necessity was baptism "by another person." Self-baptism, by immersion, was the usual Jewish rite for cleansing; for example, of women after childbirth; and of proselytes after circumcision, presumably to wash away the defilements of idolatry. In the case of proselytes, the candidate immersed himself while two persons stood by and recited to him portions of the Law. Something of this sort may be imagined as the procedure in the baptism in John's Gospel, where the prophet's presence, and perhaps exhortations, accompanied the rite. The significance of it lay in the requirement that those who were already Jews--born and circumcised as descendants of Abraham--were to undergo a baptism similar to that of proselytes, in preparing for the coming judgment. The rite itself signified the acknowledgment of their sins; whether or not an oral statement of their actual doings was required, we do not know. At least it was more than a confession of sinfulness; ancient religion was concrete and specific. (IB)

The baptism in the Jordan River is to be understood literally. It actually took place within the waters of the River. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 6:

[clothed in camel's hair . . . waist](#) -- the Baptist's garb recalls that of Elijah in II Kings 1:8. Jesus speaks of the Baptist as Elijah who has already come (Mark 9:11-13; Matthew 17:10-12; cf Malachi 3:23-24; Luke 1:17). (NAB)

This phrase is possibly an allusion to Elijah's dress in II Kings 1:8. The LXX, however, interprets this to mean that Elijah, like Esau, was hairy; and according to Zechariah 13:3 a hairy mantle was the customary dress of the prophet. Therefore, this verse may not have originally contained an Elijah-Baptist typological meaning. (JBC)

John's apparel was not that of the soft, luxurious garments worn by the wealthy. Rather it was the rough mantle of the nomads; possibly a camel's pelt which was the garb of a prophet in Zechariah 13:4. For John and for many other early Christians (not all), John is "Elijah come again." Dried locusts are still eaten by the Arabs in times of scarcity; wild honey may refer to the gum which dripped from various trees, but was more probably the honey of wild bees. (IB)

Of course, it was not camel's skin, but rough cloth woven of camel's hair. Dried locusts are considered palatable and the wild honey, or "mountain honey", was bountiful in the clefts of the rocks. Some Bedouins make their living still today by gathering this wild honey out of the rocks. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

16. Read John 1:6-8 entirely through one time.

(1) No references

John 1:6-8

- 6 A man named John was sent from God.
7 He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.
8 He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.

Verse 6:

John the Baptist is introduced with the same distinction of verbs that has contrasted the eternity of the Word with the temporality of creation. That this man was sent by God, like the prophets of old and Jesus himself, is what gives relevance to his mention here, as an intrusion into John's pre-eternity of Jesus prologue. (JBC)

John as author interjects this prose comment into the hymn of the Logos. It is the first of a number of passages in which he carefully indicates the inferiority of the Baptist to Jesus. After this introduction, the name John is never used in this Gospel, as it often is in the Synoptics, rather he is distinguished by the title Baptist. Two things are said of him: that he was commissioned by God, and that his mission was limited to testimony. The word [sent](#) carries the sense of official authority, recalling the OT prophets. The immediate purpose of the mission is [to testify to the light](#). The ulterior object is that [all might believe through him](#). In this Gospel John is merely the herald and witness, bearing testimony to the nature and titles of Jesus. We should not have learned from it that the Baptist was the prophet and leader of a great movement of national repentance and hope. The limited mission of the Baptist falls far short of a universal gospel. The testimony of John, according to this Gospel, brought to Jesus his first disciples, through whom that apostolic witness went forth, which in time was to spread throughout all the world. It is this Fourth Evangelist, and not the Synoptists, who tells us of this honorable role played by the Baptist in the drama of the world's redemption. John was the witness through whom God attested the divine sonship of Jesus. (IB)

John was sent just as Jesus was "sent" (John 4:34) in divine mission. Other references to John the Baptist in this gospel emphasize the differences between them and John's subordinate role. (NAB)

The Evangelist here approaches his grand thesis, which paves the way for the full statement of it in John 1:14, that we may be able to bear the bright light of it, and take in its length, its breadth, its depth, and its height. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 7:

[to testify to the light](#) -- Witness is one of John the Evangelist's fundamental ideas: not only the Baptist, but the Samaritan woman, the works of Jesus, the OT, the crowd, the Holy Spirit and the disciples, the Father, the Evangelist himself, all bear witness to Jesus the Word. Although the incarnation in the Gospel of John is not mentioned explicitly until verse 14, the fact that the Baptist, who is a witness to the Incarnate Word, is introduced at this point shows that John has been thinking throughout of the Word both in his external existence and in his incarnate state. (JBC)

[so that all might believe through him](#) -- Faith and its converse of unbelief because of the influence of the darkness are the theme of the first half of this Gospel. (JBC)

The testimony theme of John is introduced, which portrays Jesus as if on trial throughout his ministry. All testify to Jesus: John the Baptist, the Samaritan woman, scripture, his works, the crowds, the Spirit, and his disciples. (NAB)

Witness is more common in John's writings than the rest of the N.T. This is the purpose of the Baptist's ministry--that he might bear witness. Concerning the light, the light was shining and men with blinded eyes were not seeing the light (John 1:26), and blinded by the god of this world still (2 Corinthians 4:4). John had his own eyes opened so that he saw and told what he saw. That is the mission of every preacher of Christ. But he must first have his own eyes opened. "That all might believe" is one of John's great phrases (about 100 times), with nine times the frequency with which it is used by the Synoptists. As the intermediate agent in winning men to believe in Christ (the Logos) as the Light and the Life of men. This is likewise the purpose of the author of this book (John 20:31). The preacher is merely the herald to point men to Christ. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 8:

John carefully points out, as he does elsewhere, that the Baptist is a witness to the light, not the light itself. This is motivated not by the Baptist himself, but by the fact that his position had been misinterpreted by some who had not understood that he was only the forerunner, and not the inaugurator of God's kingdom (Acts 19:1-7). (JBC)

SESSION 12

As you could probably tell from your study guide this will be another rather lengthy session. I will be giving quite a bit of historical background on the times as well as a summary from the last session. Therefore, we may find it necessary to break this session into another two parts. For the moment, let's concentrate on the summary and overview of the times:

Summary and Overview of the Times from LToJC:

A silence, even more complete than that concerning the early life of Jesus rests on the thirty years and more, which intervened between the birth and presence of John in his character as the forerunner of the Messiah. Only his outward and inward development, and his being in the deserts, are briefly indicated. His development while in the deserts was not in the order of the Essenes, but it was to attain, in lonely isolation with God, what was sought externally. It is characteristic that, while Jesus could go straight from the home and workshop of Nazareth to the Baptism at the Jordan, his Forerunner required a long and peculiar preparation, characteristic of the difference of their persons and missions, characteristic also of the greatness of the work to be inaugurated. Luke furnishes precise notices of the time of the Baptist's public appearance--not merely to fix the exact chronology, which would have required many more details, but for a higher purpose. They indicate the fitness of the moment for the Advent of the Kingdom of Heaven. For the first time since the Babylonian Captivity, the foreigner, the Chief of the hated Roman Empire--according to the Rabbis, the fourth beast of Daniel's vision--was absolute and undisputed master of Judea; and the chief religious office was divided between two who were equally unworthy of its functions. It deserves notice that of the rulers mentioned by Luke, Pilate entered on his office only shortly before the public appearance of John, and that they all continued until after the Crucifixion of Christ. There was a continuity of these powers during the whole Messianic period.

As regards Palestine, the ancient kingdom of Herod was now divided into four parts. Judea was under the direct administration of Rome, two other tetrarchies under the rule of Herod's sons: Herod Antipas and Philip, while the small principality of Abilene was governed by Lysanias. Of Lysanias no details can be furnished, nor are they necessary to this history. It is otherwise in regards the sons of Herod, and especially the character of the Roman government at that time.

Herod Antipas, whose rule extended for forty-three years, reigned over Galilee and Perea--the districts which were respectively the principal sphere of the Ministry of Jesus and of John the Baptist. Like his brother, Archelaus, Herod Antipas possessed in even aggravated form most of the vices, but without any of the qualities of his father. Of deeper religious feeling or convictions he was entirely destitute., although his conscience occasionally misgave, and possibly restrained, him. The inherent weakness of his character left him in the absolute control of his wife, to the final ruin of his fortunes. He was covetous, avaricious, luxurious, and utterly dissipated; unsuspicious, and a good deal of that fox-cunning which, especially in the East, often forms the sum total of state-craft. Like his father, he indulged a taste for building--always taking care to propitiate Rome by dedicating all to the Emperor. The most extensive of his undertakings was the building, in 22 A.D. of the city of Tiberius, at the upper end of the Lake of Galilee. The site was

under the disadvantage of having formerly been a burying-place; which implied Levitical uncleanness, and for some time it deterred the pious Jews from settling there. Nevertheless, it rose in great magnificence from among the reeds which had previously covered the neighborhood. Herod Antipas made it his residence, and built there a strong castle and a palace of unrivalled splendor. The city, which was populated chiefly by adventurers, was mainly Grecian, and it was adorned with an amphitheater, of which the ruins can still be traced today.

A happier account can be given of Philip, the son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra of Jerusalem. He was undoubtedly the best of Herod's sons. He showed the same abject submission as the rest of his family to the Roman Empire, after whom he named the city of Caesarea Philippi, which he built at the sources of the Jordan; just as he changed the name of Bethsaida, a village of which he made an opulent city, into Julias, after the daughter of Augustus. But he was a moderate and just ruler, and his reign of 37 years contrasted favorably with that of his kinsmen. The land was quiet and prosperous, and the people were contented and happy.

As regards the Roman rule, matters had greatly changed for the worse since the mild sway of Augustus, under which, in the language of Philo, no one throughout the Empire dared to molest the Jews. The only innovations to which Israel had then to submit were, the daily sacrifices for the Emperor and the Roman people, offerings on festive days, prayers for them in the Synagogues, and such participation in national joy or sorrow as the religion allowed.

It was far different when Tiberius succeeded to the empire, and Judea was a province. Merciless harshness characterized the administration of Palestine; while the Emperor himself was bitterly hostile to Judaism and the Jews, although he was personally careless of all religion. Under his reign the persecution of the Roman Jews occurred, and Palestine suffered almost to the verge of endurance. The first procurator whom Tiberius appointed over Judea, changed the occupancy of the High-Priesthood four times, until he found in Caiphas a sufficiently submissive instrument of Roman tyranny. The exactions, and the reckless disregard of all Jewish feelings and interests might have been characterized as reaching to the extreme limit, if worse had not followed when Pontius Pilate succeeded to the procuratorship. Venality, violence, robbery, persecutions, wanton malicious insults, judicial murders without even the formality of a legal process, and cruelty--such were the charges brought against his administration. If former governors had, to some extent, respected the religious scruples of the Jews, Pilate set them purposely at defiance, and this not only once, but again and again, in Jerusalem, in Galilee, and even in Samaria, until the Emperor intervened.

Such was the political condition of the land, when John appeared to preach the near Advent of a Kingdom with which Israel associated all that was happy and glorious, even beyond the dreams of the religious enthusiast. Equally loud was the call for help in reference to those who held chief spiritual rule over the people. Luke significantly joins together Annas and Caiphus as the highest religious authority in the land. Annas had been appointed by Quirinius. After holding the Pontificate for nine years, he was deposed, and succeeded by others, of whom the fourth was his son-in-law Caiphus. The character of the High Priests during the whole of that period is described in the Talmud in terrible language. Although there is no evidence that "the house of Annas" was guilty of

the same gross self-indulgence, violence, luxury, and even public indecency as some of their successors, they are included in the woes pronounced on the corrupt leaders of the priesthood, whom the sanctuary is represented as bidding depart from the sacred precincts which their presence defiled. It deserves mention that the special sin with which the house of Annas is charged is that of “whispering”--or hissing like vipers, which seems to refer to private influence on the judges in their administration of justice, whereby morals were corrupted, judgment perverted, and the Shekhinah withdrawn from Israel.

Although the expression High-Priest appears sometimes to have been used in a general sense, as designating the sons of the High-Priest, and even the principal members of their families, there could be only one actual High-Priest. The conjunction of the two names of Annas and Caiphus probably indicates that, although Annas was deprived of the Pontificate, he still continued to preside over the Sanhedrin. This conclusion is not only borne out by Acts 4:6, where Annas appears as the actual president, and by the terms which Caiphas is spoken of, merely as “one of them”, but also by the part which Annas took in the final condemnation of Jesus.

Such a combination of political and religious distress, surely constituted the time of Israel’s utmost need. As yet no attempt had been made by the people to right themselves by armed force. In these circumstances, the cry that the Kingdom of Heaven was near at hand and the call to preparation for it, must have awakened echoes throughout the land and startled the more careless and unbelieving. It was, according to Luke’s exact statement, in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar. According to our computation, Jesus would then have been about thirty years old. The scene of John’s first public appearance was in the “wilderness of Judea”, that is, in the wild, desolate district around the mouth of the Jordan. We do not know whether John baptized in this place, nor how long he continued there, but we are expressly told that his stay was not confined to that locality. Soon afterwards we find him at Bethabara, which is farther upstream. The outward appearance and the habits of the Messenger corresponded to the character and object of his mission. Neither his dress nor his food was that of the Essenes, but more like that of Elijah whose mission he was now to fulfill.

This was evinced by what he preached and by the new symbolic rite from which he derived the name Baptist. The grand burden of his message was: the announcement of the approach of the “Kingdom of Heaven”, and the needed preparation of his hearers for that Kingdom. The latter he sought positively, by admonition, and negatively, by warnings, while he directed all to the Coming One, in whom that Kingdom would become individualized. From the first it was the “good news of the Kingdom” to which all else in John’s preaching was subsidiary.

Considering this “Kingdom of Heaven,” which was the great message of John and the great work of Christ himself, we may say that the OT sublimated and the whole NT realized it. The idea of it did not lie hidden in the OT to be opened up in the NT--as did the mystery of its realization. This rule of heaven and the Kingship of God was the very substance of the OT: (1) it was the object of the calling and mission of Israel; (2) the meaning of all its ordinances, whether civil or religious; (3) and the underlying idea of all its institutions. It explained the history of the people, the dealings of God with them, and the prospects opened up by the prophets. Without it the OT could not be understood--it gave perpetuity to its teaching, and dignity to its representations. This constituted the real

contrast between Israel and the nations of antiquity, and Israel's real title to distinction. The whole OT was the preparatory presentation of the rule of heaven and of the Kingship of its Lord.

Even the twofold hindrance -- internal and external -- which the Kingdom encountered, indicated preparation. The internal arose from the resistance of Israel to their King; the external from the opposition of the surrounding kingdoms of this world. All the more intense became the longing through thousands of years, that these hindrances might be swept away by the Advent of the promised Messiah, who would permanently establish (by his Spirit) the right relationship between the King and his Kingdom, by bringing in an everlasting righteousness, and also by casting down existing barriers, by calling the kingdoms of this world to be the Kingdom of our God. This would be the Advent of the Kingdom of God, such as had been the glowing hope held out by Zechariah and the glorious vision beheld by Daniel. Three ideas especially did this Kingdom of God imply: universality, heavenliness, and permanency. Such was the teaching of the OT, and the great hope of Israel. It needs only moral and spiritual capacity to see its matchless grandeur, in contrast with even the highest aspirations of heathenism, and the blanched ideas of modern culture.

Our previous investigations have shown how imperfectly Israel understood this Kingdom. The men of that period possessed only the term, the form of it. What explained its meaning, filled, and fulfilled it came once more from Heaven. Rabbinism and Alexandrianism kept alive the thought of it. In their own way filled the soul with its longing--just as the distress in Church and State carried the need of it to every heart with the keenness of anguish. Throughout this history the form was of that time; the substance and the spirit were of Him whose coming was the advent of that Kingdom. Perhaps the nearest approach to it lay in the higher aspirations of the Nationalist party, only that it sought their realization, not spiritually, but outwardly. Taking the sword, they perished by the sword. It was probably to this that both Pilate and Jesus referred in that memorable question: "Art thou then a king?" to which Jesus, unfolding the deepest meaning of His mission replied: "My Kingdom is not of this world: if my Kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight."

According to the Rabbinic views of the time, the terms "Kingdom", "Kingdom of heaven", and "Kingdom of God" were equivalent. In fact, the word "heaven" was very often used instead of "God" so as to avoid unduly familiarizing the ear with the Sacred Name. This probably, accounts for the exclusive use of the expression "Kingdom of Heaven" in Matthew's Gospel. Furthermore, the term did imply a contrast to earth, as the expression "the kingdom of God" did to this world. The consciousness of its contrast to earth or the world was distinctly expressed in Rabbinical writings.

The expression "Kingdom of Heaven" referred, not so much to any particular period, as it did to the rule of God as acknowledged, manifested, and eventually perfected. Very often it is the equivalent for personal acknowledgment of God, the taking upon oneself the "yoke" of the Kingdom, or of the commandments--the former preceding and conditioning the latter. Accordingly, the Messiah gives this as the reason why, in the collection of Scripture passages which forms the prayer called Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4ff.; Deuteronomy 11:13ff.), the confession (6:4ff.) precedes the admonition (11:13ff.), because a man takes upon himself first the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, afterwards

that of the commandments. And in this sense, the repetition of the Shema, as the personal acknowledgment of the Rule of God is itself often designated as “taking upon oneself the Kingdom of Heaven.” Similarly, the putting on of phylacteries, and the washing of hands, are also described as taking upon oneself the yoke of the Kingdom of God. While the acknowledgment of the Rule of God, both in profession and practice, was considered to constitute the Kingdom of God, its full manifestation was expected only in the time of the Advent of the Messiah. On the other hand, the unbelief of Israel would appear in that they would reject these three things: the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of the House of David, and the building of the Temple, according to the prediction in Hosea 3:5. It then follows that after the period of unbelief, the Messianic deliverances and blessings of the future age were expected. But this final completion of all still remained for the world to come. And that there is a distinction between the time of the Messiah and this “world to come” is frequently indicated in Rabbinic writings.

As we pass from the Jewish ideas of the time to the teaching of the NT, we feel that while there is a complete change of spirit, the form in which the idea of the Kingdom of Heaven is presented is substantially similar. Accordingly, we must dismiss the notion that the expression refers to the Church, whether visible (according to the Roman Catholic view) or invisible (according to certain Protestant writers). The Kingdom of God, or Kingly Rule of God, is an objective fact. The visible Church can only be the subjective attempt at its outward realization, of which the invisible church is the true counterpart. When Christ says, that “except a man be born from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God,” he teaches, in opposition to the Rabbinic representation of how “the Kingdom” was taken up, that a man cannot even comprehend the glorious idea of the Reign of God, and of becoming, by conscious self-surrender except he be first born from above.

The account given by Luke bears, on the face of it, that it was a summary, not only of the first, but of all John’s preaching. The very presence of his hearers at this call to, and baptism of, repentance, gave sharpness to his words. Did they who, notwithstanding their sins, lived in such security of carelessness and self-righteousness, really understand and fear the final consequences of resistance to the coming Kingdom? If so, theirs must be a repentance, not only in profession, but of heart and mind, such as would yield fruit, both good and visible. Or else did they imagine that, according to the common notion of the time, the vials of wrath were to be poured out only on the Gentiles, while they, as Abraham’s children, were sure of escape.

No principle was more fully established in the popular conviction than that all Israel had a part in the world to come, and this specifically not only from the NT, from Philo, and Josephus, but also from many Rabbinic passages. The merits of the Fathers is one of the commonest phrases in the mouth of the Rabbis. Abraham was represented as sitting at the gate of Gehenna, to deliver any Israelite, who otherwise might have been consigned to its terrors. In fact, by their descent from Abraham, all the children of Israel were nobles, infinitely higher than any proselytes.

If such had been the inner thoughts of his hearers, John warned them that God was able of those stones that were scattered along the river-bank to raise up children unto Abraham; or, reverting to his former illustration of “fruits meet for repentance”, that the proclamation of the Kingdom was, at the same time, the laying of the axe to the root of every tree that bore not fruit. Then making application of it, in answer to the specific

inquiry of various classes, the preacher gave them practical advice as applied to the well-known sins of their past; yet in this also not going beyond the merely negative, or preparatory element of "repentance." The positive, and all-important aspect of it, was to be presented by Jesus. It was only natural that the hearers wondered whether John himself was the Christ, since he urged repentance. For this was so closely connected in their thoughts with the Advent of the Messiah, that it was said, "If Israel repented but one day, the Son of David would immediately come." But here John pointed them to the difference between himself and his work, and the person and mission of the Christ. In deepest reverence, he declared himself not worthy to do Him the service of a slave or of a disciple. Christ's baptism would not be of preparatory repentance, but the Divine Baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire--in the Spirit who sanctified, and the Divine Light which purified, and so effectively qualified for the Kingdom. And there was still another contrast. John's was but preparing work, Jesus' was that of final decision; afterwards came the harvest. Early in the history of the Kingdom of God was it indicated that which would prove useless straw and the good corn were inseparably connected to God's harvest-field until the reaping time; that both belonged to him; and that the final separation would only come at the last, and by his own hand.

What John preached, that he also symbolized by a rite which in its application was wholly new. Previously the Law held that those who had contracted Levitical defilement were to immerse themselves before offering sacrifice. It was also prescribed that such Gentiles as became "proselytes of righteousness" or "proselytes of the Covenant" were to be admitted to full participation in the privileges of Israel by the threefold rites of circumcision, baptism, and sacrifice--the immersion being the acknowledgement and symbolic removal of moral defilement, corresponding to Levitical uncleanness. But never before had it been proposed that Israel should undergo, a "baptism of repentance" although there are indications of a deeper insight into the meaning of Levitical baptisms. Was it intended that the hearers of John should give this as evidence of their repentance, that, like persons defiled, they sought purification, and, like strangers, they sought admission among the people who took on themselves the Rule of God? These ideas would have made it truly a "baptism of repentance."

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17. Read Matthew 3:7-10 entirely through one time.
(1) No references

Matthew 3:7-10

- 7 When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?
- 8 Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance.
- 9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.
- 10 Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Verse 7:

brood of vipers -- This phrase suits Matthew's general pattern; the Jewish religious leaders are responsible for the refusal of the Jews to believe in the Messiah. The words of John are strongly eschatological (Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:14-16). (JBC)

Matthew adds Pharisees and Sadducees to his source (which may have come from Q). In Luke all the hearers were a "brood of vipers" who fled like snakes from a field being harvested by fire. (IB)

The name "Pharisees" is not known before the time of the high priest John Hyrcanus (ca. 120 B.C.). It is usually taken to mean "those who are separated."--probably from defilement and irreligion. On one occasion Peter was accused of breaking the law by eating with Gentiles, whereupon he "separated himself" from them (Galatians 2:12) which illustrates the principles of "separation." The Pharisees were perhaps the successors of those *h^asidhim* who in the 2nd century B.C. resisted the tendency to adopt pagan culture. They apparently banded themselves into brotherhoods for the purpose of keeping the law more strictly and of promoting their interpretation of the OT (Josephus, Antiquities. Book 13.10.6). The Pharisees opposed the despotism and Sadducean tendencies of John Hyrcanus, Aristobulus, and Alexander Jannaeus, and passively resisted Herod (Josephus, Antiquities. Book 15. 10. 4, and Book 17. 2. 4) and the Romans when religious issues were at stake. The 5th century revolutionists were principally from the Pharisaic party (Josephus, Antiquities. Book 18. 1. 1.), although most Pharisees were pacifists. (IB)

Less is known about the Sadducees, who are described in Josephus, Antiquities. 18.1.4, and all our information comes from their enemies. They may have taken the name from Zadok, Solomon's priest (I Kings 1:38-39), and have claimed to be his spiritual descendants. They were conservatives in religion, rejecting the Pharisees' development of the oral law and doctrine of resurrection. They were also political conservatives, many of them wealthy landowners who lived in Jerusalem and were friendly to the Roman government. Most of the first-century priests and their friends were Sadducees, and it is this group which, more than any other Jewish group, instigated the crucifixion of Jesus. (IB)

The Pharisees were marked by their devotion to the law, written and oral, and the scribes, experts in the law, belonged predominantly to this group. The Sadducees were the priestly aristocratic party, centered in Jerusalem. They accepted as scripture only the first five books of the Old Testament, followed only the letter of the law, rejected the oral legal traditions, and were opposed to teachings not found in the Pentateuch, such as the resurrection of the dead. Matthew links both of these groups together as enemies of Jesus (Matthew 16:1, 6, 11, 12; cf Mark 8:11-13, 15). The threatening words that follow are addressed to them rather than to "the crowds" as in Luke 3:7. The judgment that will bring about the destruction of unrepentant sinners. (NAB)

the Pharisees and Sadducees--These two rival parties do not often unite in common action, but do again in Matthew 16:1. One cannot properly understand the theological atmosphere of Palestine at this time without an adequate knowledge of both the Pharisee and Sadducee groups. John clearly grasped the significance of this movement on the part of the Pharisees and Sadducees who had followed the crowds to the Jordan. He had welcomed the multitudes, but right in the presence of the crowds he exposes the hypocrisy of the ecclesiastics. Jesus (Matthew 12:34; Matthew 23:33) will

use the same language to the Pharisees. Broods of snakes were often seen by John in the rocks, and when a fire broke out they would scurry to their holes for safety. "The coming wrath" was not just for the Gentiles as the Jews supposed, but for all who were not prepared for the kingdom of heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:10). No doubt the Pharisees and Sadducees winced under the sting of this powerful indictment. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

"Brood of vipers" expresses the deadly influence of both sects alike upon the community. Mutually and entirely antagonistic as were their religious principles and spirit, John charges both groups with being the ones who poisoned the nation's religious principles. In Matthew 12:34, 23:33, this strong language of the Baptist is again applied to the Pharisees specifically. They were the only party that had zeal enough actively to diffuse this poison. John more than suspected it was not so much their own spiritual anxieties as the popularity of his movement that had drawn them to the river bank.. "The coming wrath" is not to be viewed as being entirely in the future--as a merited sentence it lies on the sinner already. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 8:

John demands proof from these men of the new life before he administers baptism to them. The fruit is not the change of heart, but the acts which result from it. It was a bold deed for John to challenge as unworthy the very ones who posed as lights and leaders of the Jewish people. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 9:

[from these stones](#) -- The threat alludes to the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews and Gentiles in the new Israel and the true people of God. (JBC)

Although not all of them, but many Jews did believe that with Abraham as their father they had special protection. The warning that from these stones God can raise up children to Abraham is in the OT spirit and it reflects the Jewish doctrine of God's omnipotence. (IB)

[do not presume to say to yourselves](#) -- John touched the tender spot, their ecclesiastical pride. They felt that the "merits of the fathers," especially of Abraham, were enough for all Israelites. At once John made clear that a breach existed between him and the religious leaders of the time. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

John is saying something like this: "Don't flatter yourselves with the fond delusion that God stands in need of you. He has no need to make good His promise of a seed to Abraham. For I tell you that, though you were all to perish, God is able to raise up a seed to Abraham out of those stones. It was clearly the calling of the Gentiles at that time. Those Gentiles who were dead in their sins and quite unconscious of it. John meant to indicate that the Gentiles would be brought into the room and therefore take the place of the unbelieving and disinherited Israel. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

Verse 10:

This verse is in the present tense. The prophecy's fulfillment is immediate and certain. "Fire" in Jewish apocalypses often describes the final judgment. (IB)

Language so personal and individual as this can scarcely be understood of any national judgment like the approaching destruction of Jerusalem. Nor with the breaking up of the Jewish politics, and the squeezing out of the chosen people from their peculiar privileges which followed it. These words would serve as the dark shadow, cast before them, of a more terrible retribution to come. The "fire," which in another verse is called

"unquenchable," can be no other than that future "torment" of the impenitent. (Internet--Crosswalk site)

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18. Read Luke 3:7-18 entirely though one time
(1) No references
19. Read Luke 3:7
(1) Matthew 12:34
20. Read Luke 3:8
(1) John 8:39
22. Read Luke 3:9
(1) Matthew 7:19 (2) John 15:
23. Read Luke 3:10-11
(1) No references
24. Read Luke 3:12
(1) Luke 7:29
25. Read Luke 3:13-14
(1) No references
26. Read Luke 3:15-16
(1) Acts 13:25
27. Read Luke 3:16
(1) Luke 7:19-20 (3) Acts 1:5
(2) John 1:27 (4) Acts 11:16
28. Read Luke 3:17
(1) Matthew 3:12
29. Read Luke 3:18
(1) No references

Luke 3:7-18

- 7 He said to the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?
- 8 Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance; and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.
- 9 Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

- 10 And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?"
11 He said to them in reply, "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise."
12 Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him, "Teacher, what should we do?"
13 He answered them, "Stop collecting more than what is prescribed."
14 Soldiers also asked him, "And what is it that we should do?" He told them, "Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages."
15 Now the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah.
16 John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire.
17 His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."
18 Exhorting them in many other ways, he preached good news to the people.

Verse 7:

In verses 7-9 Luke presents a summary of the Baptist's preaching which took place on many occasions. (JBC)

Luke omits Mark's description of the Baptist's dress and fare. Rather he elaborates on his preaching of repentance and judgment. The multitudes that present themselves for baptism are a brood of vipers. Like snakes that flee before a fire, the penitents have become apprehensive of the judgment that is to close their age. But their merely formal repentance must issue in a new way of life that goes beyond routine almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. They are not to be lulled by pride of race (cf. Romans 2:17-29) into any false sense of security. In true prophetic fashion (cf. Amos, Jeremiah), John asserts that God would still be God even if those who claim Abraham as father should perish. In deliberate and obvious exaggeration, he vigorously declares that God could raise up children to Abraham from the lifeless stones of the desert. Furthermore the wrath to come is not some distant threat. Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Those whose conduct is not suitable to their pretensions face imminent judgment. (IB)

the crowds -- Luke often substitutes this more general word where the other Gospels read Pharisees, Sadducees, or scribes. Luke thereby gives a wider scope to Jesus' words. From the subject matter of John's words, it seems that Matthew and Mark more accurately identify the learned, Jewish audience. (JBC)

brood of vipers -- This phrase is probably a genuine memory of John's words. It is one of many desert images in John's preaching; for example, he also speaks of "stones," "dried bushes," and "barren trees." Throughout the Gospels "vipers" is an eschatological term referring to men under diabolical power at the time of the final struggle. (JBC)

Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? -- The phrase "the coming wrath" contains all the fury of such prophetic words as Isaiah 13:9; 30:27; Zephaniah 2:2 and Malachi 3:2. John demands sincere, total turning to the Lord at once. (JBC)

He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire-- in contrast to John's baptism with water, Jesus is said to baptize with the holy Spirit and with fire. From early Christian community's point of view, the Spirit and fire must have been understood in the light of the fire symbolism of the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4); but as part of John's preaching, the Spirit and fire should be related to their purifying and refining characteristics (Ezekiel 36:25-27; Malachi 3:2-3). (NAB)

Whereas Matthew 3:7-10 singled out the message of John to the Pharisees and Sadducees, Luke speaks to the crowds. A summary of his preaching to the crowds is given with special replies to these inquiries: the multitudes, (Matthew 10,11), the publicans (Matthew 12,13), and the soldiers (Matthew 14). The purpose of their coming was to be baptized of him. Matthew 3:7 has simply "to his baptism." John's metaphors are from the wilderness. Who warned you? The verb is like our "to suggest" by proof to eye, ear, or brain (Luke 6:47; Luke 12:5; Acts 9:16; Acts 20:35; Matthew 3:7). (INT)

Verse 8:

Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance -- While Matthew has the singular, referring to the final preparation before the last day, Luke has the plural "fruits", denoting good actions in general. (JBC)

God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones -- The Baptist, like Paul many years later (Romans 4:13-17) clearly states that no human works, but only God's act of infusing faith produces life within the chosen people and membership in their ranks. (JBC)

Verses 10-14:

These verses, which are exclusive to Luke, reveal the Evangelist's interest in the universal aspect of redemption. John the Baptist pronounces his sociological message to publicans and their bodyguards. (JBC)

Moral precepts are now introduced, presumably from a source other than Q. Coats were tunics or undershirts. The Romans farmed out the right to collect various taxes in Palestine to petty Jewish contractors. The tax collectors of the Gospels were their deputies. They were heartily disliked and despised by their countrymen, partly because Roman taxes were regarded as an unwarranted imposition by a foreign overlord, and partly because the method of collecting the taxes lent itself to extortion all down the line. Jews were not enrolled in Roman legions, but presumably native soldiers could be recruited by Herod Antipas for his own personal service. No doubt they were often able to supplement their wages by intimidating civilians. (IB)

If these are typical samples of John's ethical teaching, it was by no means radical. The well to do were urged to share their surplus of clothing and food and those whose profession offered temptations of unjust and dishonest enrichment were warned against the vice of avarice. (IB)

Coats were the inner and less necessary undergarment. The outer indispensable imation is not mentioned. Note the specific and different message to each class. John puts his finger on the weaknesses of the people right before him. (INT)

Verse 12:

Instead of "**tax collectors**" some versions use the word "publicans". Both terms mean they were men who bought from the Romans the right to collect taxes. They were despised by the Jews and also by the Gentiles. (JBC)

The term publicans was sometimes coupled with harlots and other sinners, the outcasts of society. The original Greek word is made up from tax and to buy, and it is an old one. The renter or collector of taxes was not popular anywhere, but least of all when a Jew collected taxes for the Romans and did it by terrible graft and extortions. The verb “extort” means only to do or practice, but early the tax-collectors learned how to “do” the public as regular “blood-suckers.” (INT)

Verse 14:

Soldiers -- These men did not belong to the regular troops of Herod Antipas or the Roman procurator. Rather they provided armed support for the tax collectors. (JBC)

Do not practice extortion -- some versions say: “rob no one” which means literally “shake no one violently”, in order to extort money from them. Luke does not ask of these men a high mysticism but only a practical spirituality. (JBC)

Some of these soldiers acted as police to help the publicans. But they were often rough and cruel. In the original Greek “to exhort” means to shake thoroughly (as in the seismic disturbance of an earthquake), and so thoroughly as to terrify, to extort money or property by intimidation (3Macc. 7:21). It was a process of blackmail. This was a constant temptation to soldiers. (INT)

be satisfied with your wages -- “wages” has the same meaning here of “rations.” We may take this as a warning against mutiny, which the officers attempted to suppress by gifts and donations. Therefore, the “fruits” which would be evidence of their repentance were just resistance to the reigning sins, particularly of the *class* to which the penitent belonged, and the manifestation of an opposite spirit. (INT)

Might does not make right with Jesus. These soldiers were tempted to obtain money by informing against the rich--by blackmail. The original Greek word eventually came to mean “to accuse falsely.” Be content with your wages. Discontent with wages was a complaint of mercenary soldiers. This word for wages was originally used for anything cooked and bought. Hence, “rations,” “pay,” wages. The original word came to mean whatever is bought to be eaten with bread, and later a soldier's pay or allowance as in 1 Corinthians 9:7. Paul uses the singular of a preacher's pay (2 Corinthians 11:8) and the plural of the wages of sin (Romans 6:23) = death (death is the diet of sin). (INT)

Verses 15-17:

Luke now presents the Baptist's Messianic preaching. In a verse that is exclusive to himself, he first gives the psychological setting: The people were on tiptoe of expectation.” (JBC)

The interesting interrelationships of Matthew, Mark, and Luke at this point are not easily explained. Is it possible that Mark drew his account of John's preaching from the common source Q, or is it possible that there has been some harmonization of these texts by early copyists? (IB)

Verse 15:

This verse is an editorial introduction to John's prophecy of the coming Messiah. (IB)

Were in expectation -- John's preaching about the Messiah and the kingdom of God stirred the people deeply and set them to wondering whether or not he was the Christ. John wrought no miracles and was not in David's line, and yet he moved people so mightily that they began to suspect that he himself was the Messiah. The Sanhedrin will

one day send a formal committee to ask him this direct question (John 1:19). (INT)

Verses 16-17:

John vitalized the Jewish messianic hope by announcing the coming of one who is mightier, one for whom he himself was not worthy to perform even the menial service of slave. He thought of the Messiah's mission in terms of conventional Jewish imagery. Just as a farmer would take the winnowing fork, separate the wheat from the chaff by throwing the trodden grain against the wind, store the wheat in his granary, and then burn the chaff, so the Messiah would separate the evil from the good. John contrasts his own baptism with water and the Messiah's baptism with fire; that is, the unquenchable fire of the Day of Judgment that would purge the body of God's people and consume the sinners. One might wonder if the phrase "with the Holy Spirit" was possibly added to John's original message at some early date to do justice to the Christian experience. (IB)

Verse 16:

mightier than I -- Jesus is the great liberator in the war against Satan. The word "mighty" is often used in Scripture for the leader of the final struggle with evil. (JBC)

baptize you with the holy Spirit -- The Scriptures frequently attribute messianic achievement to the Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26ff.; Isaiah 44:3; Joel 3:1), but special prominence is given to the Spirit in Luke's writings. Throughout the Bible many extraordinary accomplishments reveal the presence of the Spirit (the life-power) of God: in creation (Genesis 1:2); in warriors (Judge 3:10; 11:29; I Samuel 11:6); in particular offices (Genesis 41:38-40; Numbers 11:17, 25; 27:18); in the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 42:1); and in the messianic king (Isaiah 11:1ff.). (JBC)

baptize with ... fire -- In Scripture, fire very often indicates the presence of the Savior-God. Fire has a prominent place in liturgical services where man meets his savior (Leviticus 1:7ff.; 6:2, 6). Great theophanies surround God with fire (Genesis 15:17; Exodus 3:1ff.; 13:21f.; Numbers 14:14; Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1:4ff.; Joel 3:3). God comes "in fire" to judge, that is, to fulfill his promises to the elect and remove evil from their midst; and this nuance shows up in the Dead Sea Scrolls (the Qumran texts). The "fiery" arrival of messianic judgment may have its roots in Numbers 31:23 and/or Malachi 3:3, 19. In view of this rich biblical background it is difficult to decide whether the Baptist's statement about Jesus identifies the fire with the Spirit's purifying and sanctifying action or, instead, adds a new dimension of eschatological judgment. (JBC)

Like Mark 1:7, "the one mightier than I." John would not be turned aside because of the flattery of the crowd. He was able to take his own measure in comparison with the Messiah and was loyal to him. This bold Messianic picture in the Synoptic Gospels shows that John saw the Messiah's coming as a judgment upon the world like fire and the fan of the thrashing-floor, and with unquenchable fire for the chaff (Luke 3:17; Matthew 3:12). But he had the spiritual conception also, the baptism in the Holy Spirit which will characterize the Messiah's Mission and so will far transcend the water baptism which marked the ministry of John. (INT)

Verse 17:

His winnowing fan -- The image of winnowing wheat is a frequent one in the Bible for separation (purification) and fiery judgment (Isaiah 29:5-6; 41:16; Jeremiah 15:7). With a wooden shovel the Palestinian farmer tossed the crushed stalks into the air. The heavier grain fell quickly to the ground, while the lighter chaff was blown by the

wind to the edge of the threshing area, where it was gathered and later burned. (JBC)
[unquenchable fire](#) -- ferocious heat (Isaiah 66:24; Mark 9:43f.) (JBC)

Verse 18:

Many other exhortations -- Literally, many and different things did John evangelize to the people. Luke has given a bare sample of the wonderful messages of the Baptist. Few as his words are preserved, but what have been given give a definite and powerful conception of his preaching. (INT)

[Exhorting them in many other ways](#) -- Such as can be read in John 1:29,33,34, 3:27-36. (INT)

SESSION 13

John's cry of "Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" must have awakened echoes throughout the land, and brought from city, village, and hamlet the strangest of hearers. For once, every distinction was leveled. Pharisee and Sadducee, as well as the outcast publican and semi-heathen soldier, met here on common ground. Their bond of union was the common hope of Israel -- the only hope that remained of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom had been the last word of the OT. Each successive thought in the chain of prophecy bound Israel anew to this hope, and each seemed only more firmly wielded than the other. And when the voice of prophecy had ceased, the sweetness of its melody still held the people spell-bound, even when broken by the wild fantasies of apocalyptic literature. The hope of that Davidic Kingdom, of which there was not a single trace or representative left, was even stronger than before.

Now the cry had been suddenly raised: "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" It was heard in the wilderness of Judea, within a few hours' distance from Jerusalem. No wonder the Pharisees and Sadducees flocked to the spot. John's call was not a call to armed resistance, but to repentance, such as all knew and felt must precede the Kingdom. The hope which he held out was not of earthly possessions, but of purity. There was nothing negative or controversial in what he spoke; nothing to excite prejudice or passion. His appearance would command respect, and his character was in accordance with his appearance. He wore not the rich, nor the Pharisaic, garb, but rather the prophet's poor raiment held in by a leather girdle. Not a luxurious life, but one of meanest fare. Yet everything about the man seemed true and real. "Not a reed shaken by the wind, but unbendingly firm in deep and settled conviction. Not ambitious nor self-seeking but rather most humble in his self-estimate, discarding all claim except that of the lowliest service, and pointing away from himself to Him Who was to come; and Whom as yet he did not even know. For himself, he sought nothing. For them he had only one absorbing thought--The Kingdom was at hand, the King was coming--let them prepare themselves!

Such entire absorption in his mission must have given force to his message. The year was probably a sabbatical one. Since they were temporarily released from business and agriculture, the multitudes flocked around him as he passed on his Mission. Rapidly the tidings spread from town and village to distant homestead, still swelling were the numbers that hastened to the banks of the sacred river. He had now reached what seems to have been the most northern point of his Mission-journey, Beth-Abara--according to the ancient reading, Bethany which was one of the best known fords across the Jordan into Perea. Here he baptized. The ford was little more than twenty miles from Nazareth. But long before John had reached that spot, tidings of his word and work must have come even into the retirement of Jesus' home-life.

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30. Read Matthew 3:11-12 entirely through one time.

31. Read Matthew 3:11

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------|-----|---------------|
| (1) | John 1:26-27 and 33 | (2) | Acts 1:5 |
| 32. | Read Matthew 3:12 | | |
| (1) | Isaiah 41:16 | (3) | Matthew 13:30 |
| (2) | Jeremiah 15:7 | | |

Matthew 3:11-12

- 11 I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire.
- 12 His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

These verses contain the Messianic preaching of John. Matthew has expanded this portion of his Gospel from Mark. Verse 12 is from the Q source. To Mark's baptism with a Holy Spirit, both Matthew and Luke add "with fire." This seems to be an allusion not only to fire as the element that symbolizes the presence of the deity, but also to the appearance of the Holy Spirit in tongues of fire in the Pentecost narrative. In the expansion from Q, the fire is the destroying fire of Gehenna. It is clear from the importance of John both in Judaism and in primitive Christianity that his messianic witness was of great value. Some apparently were ready to take John as the Messiah. John himself disclaimed this office, and pointed to another. The complete witness of John is given later in 11:2-6. (JBC)

John's disciples continued as a separate group long after his death. Jesus was at one time thought to have been one of John's disciples. The evangelists have done all that they can to minimize this false belief. (IB)

Verse 11:

baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire-- the water baptism of John will be followed by an "immersion" of the repentant in the cleansing power of the Spirit of God, and of the unrepentant in the destroying power of God's judgment. However, some see the holy Spirit and fire as synonymous, and the effect of this "baptism" as either purification or destruction. (NAB)

mightier than I -- His baptism is water baptism, but the Coming One "will baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire." Life in the coming age is in the sphere of the Spirit. Spirit and fire are coupled with one preposition as a double baptism. As the humblest of servants John felt unworthy to even take off the sandals of the Coming One. (INT)

I am not worthy to carry his sandals --The sandals were tied and untied, and borne about by the servants. (INT)

he will baptize you -- "He it is," to the exclusion of all others, "that shall baptize you." (INT)

with the Holy Spirit -- John symbolized only the outward sign of purification. It would be the sole prerogative of Jesus to dispense the inward reality. (INT)

and fire -- This seems to be the fiery character of the Spirit's operations upon the soul-searching, consuming, refining, and sublimating. In two successive clauses, the two most familiar emblems--water and fire--are employed to set forth the same purifying

operations of the Holy Spirit upon the soul. (INT)

Verse 12:

The discrimination between the good and the bad is compared to the procedure by which a farmer separates wheat and chaff. The winnowing fan was a forklike shovel with which the threshed wheat was thrown into the air. The kernels fell to the ground; the light chaff, blown off by the wind, was gathered and burned up. (NAB)

The threshing floor, the fan, the wheat, the garner, the chaff, and the fire all furnish a life-like picture. The "fire" here is probably judgment by and at the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah "will thoroughly cleanse". He will sweep from side to side to make it clean. (INT)

is in his hand -- ready for use. This is no other than the preaching of the Gospel, which is now beginning, the effect of which would be to separate the solid from the spiritually worthless, as wheat, by the winnowing fan, from the chaff. He will thoroughly purge his floor -- that is, the visible Church. He will also gather his wheat -- that is, His true-hearted saints; so called for their solid worth. (INT)

the chaff he will burn -- These are the empty, worthless professors of religion, void of all solid religious principle and character; for example, the Pharisees and Sadducees. (INT)

with unquenchable fire -- There is an element of double understanding in these words: One understanding would be to be burnt up with a fire that is unquenchable -- one expresses the utter destruction of all that constitutes one's true life, while the other one expresses the continued consciousness of existence in that awful condition. (INT)

33. Read Mark 1:7-8 entirely through one time

34. Read Mark 1:7
(1) No references

35. Read Mark 1:8
(1) John 1:27 (3) Acts 11:16
(2) Acts 1:5

Mark 1:7-8

7 And this is what he proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.

8 I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the holy Spirit."

Verse 7:

One mightier than I -- Elijah. John the Baptist initially cast Jesus in the role of Elijah (Malachi 3:3; 4:1-6). (JBC)

In John's preaching this phrase probably meant "the messenger of the covenant" (Malachi 3:1 - 4:3) who was to inaugurate the divine judgment as a consuming fire. (IB)

In each of the Synoptics, the phrase "one mightier than I" could be viewed as a

skeptical depreciation of himself by John. But it was sincere on John's part and he gives a reason for it. The straps (as in some versions) was the thong of the sandal which held it together. When a guest comes into the house, this action is performed by a slave before one enters the bath. Mark alone gives this touch. (INT)

[after me](#) -- That is, the one who is to appear soon. As used here, it is probably a Semitism, announcing that the Messenger-Judge is about to appear (cf. Acts 13:25). (IB)
Verse 8:

[will baptize you with the holy Spirit](#) -- The following quotation can be seen in the Dead Sea Scrolls: In the season of divine visitation "God will purify with his truth all man's deeds and will refine for himself the body of man, rooting out every spirit of iniquity from the midst of his flesh and cleansing it of all impurity with a holy spirit. Like waters of purification he shall pour over him the spirit of truth." Such a background for this verse would explain why it is immediately followed by the episode of Jesus' own baptism and his temptation by Satan. (JBC)

The saying in this verse is attributed to Jesus in Acts 1:5 and 11:16. This was probably the form in which it was current in circles familiar to Luke. In its Q form, as the parallels in Matthew and Luke show, the saying probably ran something like this: "I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with fire." Mark interpreted "fire" to mean the Holy Spirit, a view that Luke also followed in Acts; in the Gospels, Matthew and Luke conflate and read "with the Holy Spirit and with fire," and then continue with Q, giving the words about the threshing floor and the chaff which shall be "burned with unquenchable fire." What John said, therefore, is that the coming one would baptize men in the fire of divine judgment. This is a further confirmation of the view that John was a prophet of judgment, taking up where Malachi had laid down, rather than a prophet of the kingdom of God (see Luke 16:16). (IB)

It is apparent that these first 8 verses in Mark are simply introductory to the account of Jesus' public ministry, and to the narrative of his baptism. John's work is viewed from the Christian angle -- his significance is only preparatory to the coming of Christ, and no effort has been made to present him from a purely historical or biographical point of view. There is nothing merely biographical or historical in the Gospel--the book is written "out of faith" and "for faith," that is, for the creation, or the confirmation, of Christian faith in all matters. (IB)

Through the life-giving baptism with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8), Jesus will create a new people of God. (NAB)

The water baptism by John was a symbol of the spiritual baptism by Jesus. (INT)

* * * * *

36. Read John 1:19-28 entirely through one time

37. Read John 1:19
(1) No references

38. Read John 1:20
(1) Luke 3:15 (3) Acts 13:25
(2) John 3:28

39. Read John 1:21
 (1) Deuteronomy 18:15 & 18 (5) Matthew 11:14
 (2) II Kings 2:11 (6) Matthew 17:11-13
 (3) Sirach 48:10 (7) Mark 9:13
 (4) Malachi 3:1 & 23 (8) Acts 3:22
40. Read John 1:22
 (1) No references
41. Read John 1:23
 (1) Isaiah 40:3 (3) Mark 1:2
 (2) Matthew 3:3 (4) Luke 3:4
42. Read John 1:24
 (1) No references
43. Read John 1:25
 (1) Ezekiel 36:25 (3) Matthew 16:14
 (2) Zechariah 13:1
44. Read John 1:26
 (1) Matthew 3:11 (3) Luke 3:16
 (2) Mark 1:7-8 (4) Acts 13:25
45. Read John 1:27-28
 (1) No references

John 1:19-28

- 19 And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites (to him) to ask him, "Who are you?"
- 20 he admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, "I am not the Messiah."
- 21 So they asked him, "What are you then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No."
- 22 So they said to him, "Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?"
- 23 He said: "I am 'the voice of one crying out in the desert, "Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as Isaiah the prophet said."
- 24 Some Pharisees were also sent.
- 25 They asked him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet?"
- 26 John answered them, "I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize,
- 27 the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."
- 28 This happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Verse 19:

this is the testimony of John -- Despite the development of his theology, John restricts his Gospel to the Synoptic pattern of public ministry and the passion account, beginning with the ministry of John the Baptist. He does not, as does Matthew and Luke, preface the essential of the Gospel with other information about the earlier life of Jesus, although he must have had such information. The Baptist is introduced very abruptly (apart from the slight notice that we saw in the Prologue). This presupposes the Synoptic material on his preaching of the coming of the Kingdom of God. That the testimony of the Baptist is so important to John is partly explained by the necessity of clarifying his relation to Christ in his own words for some of his followers who still survived as a movement independent of Christianity (cf. Acts 19:1-7). (JBC)

the Jews -- In John's Gospel this expression is used for the representatives of Judaism, especially its leadership at Jerusalem, which proves to be hostile to Jesus. There is no mention in the Synoptics of such an embassy as this to the Baptist, but John's account is compatible with such references as Mark 1:5 and Matthew 3:7, which also bring out the opposition between the Baptist and the Jewish leadership. (JBC)

"The Jews" is a name sometimes used by John to include Galileans, especially when Jewish observances are under consideration; and sometimes the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea. The reference here is to the religious authorities in the Sanhedrin. Of the two parties, the Sadducean group was led by the High-Priestly family of Annas. It was this section that sent the priests and Levites to John. The Pharisees mentioned in verse 24 would hardly send an embassy of Levites to John. That would therefore be a separate deputation. (IB)

priests and Levites -- These classes represented those who were empowered under the Law to make religious decisions. They underline the official nature of the embassy. The combination of "priests and Levites" occurs only here in the NT. (JBC)

to ask him, "Who are you?" -- This is a question that is asked of Jesus in 8:25 and 21:12. Since the "I am" has such significance in relation to Christ's identification of himself, it is no idle choice of words by which the Baptist, in the following verses, says two times-- "I am not." (JBC)

The question "Who are you?", as in 8:25 refers not to identity but to status and claim in the religious life of the nation. (IB)

Throughout most of the gospel, the phrase "the Jews" does not refer to the Jewish people as such but to the hostile authorities, both Pharisees and Sadducees, particularly in Jerusalem, who refuse to believe in Jesus. The usage reflects the atmosphere, at the end of the first century, of polemics between church and synagogue, or possibly it refers to Jews as representative of a hostile world (John 1:10-11). (NAB)

Just as the author assumes the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke, so he assumes the Synoptic accounts of the baptism of Jesus by John, but adds various details of great interest and value between the baptism and the Galilean ministry. He thereby fills out our knowledge of this first year of the Lord's ministry in various parts of Palestine. The story in John proceeds along the same lines as in the Synoptics. John constantly uses the phrase "the Jews" as descriptive of the people, as distinct from the Gentile world, and from the followers of Christ who were themselves at first Jews. Often

he uses it of the Jewish leaders and rulers in particular who soon took a hostile attitude toward both John and Jesus. Here it is the Jews from Jerusalem (the Sadducees) who sent the priests and Levites. The author later explains that it was the Pharisees who sent the Sadducees. The Synoptics throw a flood of light on this circumstance, for in Matthew 3:7 we are told that the Baptist called the Pharisees and Sadducees "offspring of vipers" (Luke 3:7). Popular interest in John grew until people were wondering "in their hearts concerning John whether he was the Christ" (Luke 3:15). So the Sanhedrin finally sent a committee to John to get his own view of himself, but the Pharisees saw to it that Sadducees were sent. "Who art thou?" The committee from the Sanhedrin put the question sharply to John to define his claims concerning the Messiah. (INT)

the Jews -- that is, the heads of the nation, the members of the Sanhedrim. The evangelist always seems to use the term in this peculiar sense. (INT)

The evangelist proceeds to give a large, and full account of the testimony John the Baptist bore to Christ, which he had hinted at before, and had signified was his work, and office, and the end of his being sent. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, who art thou? The Jews that were sent were of the great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, whose business it was to inquire into, examine, and try prophets, whether true or false. Since John appeared as a prophet and was so esteemed by the people, they deputed messengers to him to interrogate him, and know who he was. The persons sent were very likely of their own body, since priests and Levites were in that council. (INT)

They do not appoint in the Sanhedrin any one but priests, Levites, and Israelites, who have their genealogies. (INT)

Such a Sanhedrin was a lawful one, but all priests and Levites that had proper qualifications were to be admitted. A message from so august an assembly -- at so great a distance, (for Jordan was a day's journey distant from Jerusalem; according to Josephus it was 210 furlongs, or 26 1/4 miles), and by the hands of persons of such character and figure, was doing John a great deal of honor. It serves to make his testimony of Christ the more public and remarkable. It also shows what a noise John's ministry and baptism made among the Jews. It had even reached to Jerusalem and the great council of the nation. The way in which they put their questions to him seems to intimate that they may have even thought him, at first, to be the Messiah. At any rate it does show the opinion that was entertained of him. Even the Sanhedrin might not be without such thoughts. (INT)

Verse 20:

The most important element of the Baptist's negative confession follows: "I am not the Messiah." The word "confess" in the NT usually refers to affirmations concerning Christ. (JBC)

Messiah -- the anointed agent of Yahweh, usually considered to be of Davidic descent. (NAB)

And he confessed -- He did not contradict or refuse to say who he was. (INT)

While many were ready to hail him as the Christ, he neither gave the slightest ground for such views, nor the least entertainment to them. (INT)

Verse 21:

Two further identifications are proposed in this verse, each of which the Baptist declines: (JBC)

[Are you Elijah?](#) -- It was a Jewish belief that the prophet Elijah would return to earth to take a part in the establishment of God's kingdom (Malachi 3:23; Sirach 48:4-12). In the Synoptics Jesus states that the Baptist has fulfilled this mission of Elijah (cf. Matthew 11:14; 17:12). The Baptist was, of course, not Elijah literally come back to life, and therefore could reply as he does here. But probably more is signified than this: The Baptist himself, as we know from Matthew 11:1-6 was not aware of the full magnitude of Christ's messianic character; correspondingly he is less competent than was Jesus to evaluate his own relation to Christ. (JBC)

[Are you the Prophet?](#) -- John 6:14; 7:40, and Acts 7:37 all refer to Deuteronomy 18:15, 18--the prophet promised by Moses. Though the text of Deuteronomy does not refer to any specific prophet, but rather to the prophetic order, it was apparently believed that an individual prophet like Moses would appear to play a role in the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. Although it is rare in the rabbinical literature, the figure of the eschatological prophet may appear in the Dead Sea Scrolls where he is mentioned in conjunction with the coming of the Messiah. At any rate, it was believed that the prophetic order, the lack of which was felt, would be restored (I Macabees 4:46; 14:41). (JBC)

Three titles are disowned by the Baptist. He was not the Christ, the Messiah, though his baptism was an eschatological sacrament sealing men for the coming Kingdom of God. He was not the Elijah foretold in Malachi 4:5. He was not the prophet whose coming was expected in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:15. There is no difficulty about the first disclaimer. The second is not easy to understand in view of Mark 9:11-13 and Matthew 11:14. It is best explained by Luke 1:17, where the prophesy is applied to the Baptist, with the qualification, "He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah." The Jewish expectation was that Elijah himself would return in bodily form. The chief difficulty is to determine what was understood by "the prophet." The allusion, no doubt, is to the Deuteronomic words ascribed to Moses, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken." The reference is repeated in this Gospel (6:14; 7:40), but is absent from the Synoptics. From Acts 3:22 and 7:37 it is clear that the early Christians found the promised realized in Jesus. This, however, was not due to any contemporary identification of "the prophet" with the Messiah. Rabbinical references to Deuteronomy 18:15 are rare and never identify him with any historical figure. Popular speculation roamed freely, as the mention of Jeremiah (Matthew 16:14) shows, although he is never named either as a forerunner of the Messiah or as connected with the Messianic age. (IB)

[Elijah](#) -- the Baptist did not claim to be Elijah returned to earth (cf Malachi 3:23; Matthew 11:14). (NAB)

[the Prophet](#) -- probably the prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15; cf Acts 3:22). (NAB)

The next inevitable question since Elijah had been understood to be the forerunner of the Messiah from Malachi 4:5. In Mark 9:11 Jesus will identify John with the Elijah of Malachi's prophecy. Why then does John here flatly deny it? Because the expectation was that Elijah would return in person. This John denies. Jesus only asserts that John was Elijah in spirit. Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15) had spoken of a prophet like unto himself. Christians interpreted this prophet to be the Messiah (Acts 3:22; Acts 7:37), but

The Jews had a notion that the prophet of Deuteronomy would come in person a

little before the coming of the Messiah. The messengers had been fully satisfied when the Baptist told them that he was not the Messiah, still they inquired if he was Elijah. (INT)

He was not Elijah; neither was he Jeremiah, nor any one of the old prophets risen from the dead. He was not a prophet in the sense they meant. He was not like one of the prophets of the Old Testament. He was a prophet, and more than a prophet, as Christ says, (Matthew 11:9). Yet he was not such a prophet as those of old because his prophesying lay not so much in predicting future events, as in pointing out Christ, and preaching the doctrine of the remission of sins by him. (INT)

Verses 22-23:

In reply to a demand for a positive identification of himself, the Baptist refuses to relate himself to any person at all; he is merely the voice of Isaiah 40:3 heralding the good news of salvation. The same self-identification is recorded by the Synoptic tradition. (JBC)

In verses 22 to 26 John follows closely the words of the tradition which are found almost verbatim in the Synoptic (Matthew 3:3, 11; Mark 1:3, 7-8; Luke 3:4, 16). All four cite the opening words of the great evangelic prophet of the Exile (Isaiah 40:3), but John alone reports the Baptist as saying: "I am 'the voice of one crying out in the desert'". He will not claim a place and a name for himself. He is but a voice. It is noteworthy that John alone is silent about the baptism with the Holy Spirit. That is to be told in another way in "this spiritual gospel." Other peculiarities are found in the phrase "whom you do not recognize" (verse 26) and the local interest characteristically shown in verse 28. This phrase, of course, is a reference to the unknown Christ. Even John the Baptist recognized him only by special revelation (verse 33). (IB)

This is a repunctuation and reinterpretation (as in the synoptic gospels and Septuagint) of the Hebrew text of Isaiah 40:3 which reads, "A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord." (NAB)

I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness -- For his answer John quotes Isaiah 40:3. The Synoptics (Mark 1:3; Matthew 3:3; Luke 3:4) quote this language from Isaiah as descriptive of John, but do not say that he also applied it to himself. There is no reason to think that he did not do so. John also refers to Isaiah as the author of the words and also of the message, "Make straight the way of the Lord". By this language John identifies himself to the committee as the forerunner of the Messiah. (INT)

Verse 22:

In their questioning of the Baptist, the group wanted answers from John, and not just simply the opinions of others. The representative party that had been deputized to question John wanted to represent him in a true light to those whom they had to make a report. (INT)

Verse 23:

John responded that he was the voice of one crying in the wilderness. These words are cited by the other evangelists, and applied to John the Baptist. However, they are applied to him by others. Here they are used by John who is speaking for himself. He expresses them and interprets them of himself. He was undoubtedly under the infallible direction of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 24:

Pharisees -- Most manuscripts indicate that the emissaries were Pharisees, which

causes difficulty, since they have been identified above in verse 19 as priests and Levites, who ordinarily were not Pharisees. The difficulty increases if we follow the manuscripts that omit the article before "who has been sent," for it then appears that the Pharisees had sent the embassy, a thing that they had no authority to do. It seems likely that the editor of John has combined in this section more than one interrogation made of the Baptist (cf. Luke 3:7-18), and that the questioners of verses 24ff. are not those of 19ff. (JBC)

[some Pharisees](#) -- other translations, such as "Now they had been sent from the Pharisees," misunderstand the grammatical construction. This is a different group from that in John 1:19; the priests and Levites would have been Sadducees, not Pharisees. (NAB)

They had been sent -- As the source of the committee of Sadducees. (INT)

Those who were sent were of the Pharisees. These were among the strictest sect of religion among the Jews. They were very zealous of the traditions of the elders. They professed an expectation of the Messiah. Also they were famous in the nation for their knowledge and learning, as well as for their devotion and sanctity. Many of them were in the Sanhedrin, as appears from John 3:1 and Acts 23:6. (INT)

Verse 25:

It would have been Pharisees particularly, watchmen as they were over traditional Jewish law and practice, who would have shown concern about the baptism of John. That he was known especially for his baptizing has not been mentioned thus far, and is presumed common knowledge from the Synoptic tradition. Baptismal rites of various kinds were then in practice: The Jews baptized proselytes, for example, and the Essenes baptized initiates into their eschatological community. (JBC)

The answer to their question is given in verses 31 and 33. The Baptist was sent on a mission of baptism that the Coming One might be made known. He himself did not know the one he was to proclaim, but a sign was given by which the Messiah was to be recognized (verses 31-33). The evangelist does not record the baptism of Jesus by John. The fact was well known from the tradition already followed by the Synoptics. But whereas in the Synoptic account the vision of the dove, together with the voice of God, came to Jesus alone, in this Gospel the sign was for John. In later Judaism a mysterious voice by which God would, on occasion, communicate with men after the end of prophecy was known as the "daughter of the voice." (IB)

[I baptize with water](#) -- the synoptics add "but he will baptize you with the holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8) or ". . . holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16). John's emphasis is on purification and preparation for a better baptism. (NAB)

They did not interpret his claim to be "the voice" to be important enough to justify the ordinance of baptism. It has been shown that proselyte baptism was probably practiced before John's time, but its use by John was treating the Jews as if they were themselves Gentiles. (INT)

Thinking he disclaimed any special connection with the Messiah's kingdom, they demand his right to gather disciples by baptism. (INT)

Verses 26-27:

The Baptist justifies his baptism in water as a preparation for the Messiah who is already in Israel's midst but who has not yet been revealed. (JBC)

[whom you do not recognize](#) -- The Baptist uses the same humble expression to

signify his inferiority to Christ that is found in Mark 1:7, but in John he does not specify until verse 33 that the baptism of Christ will be a baptism of the Holy Spirit. (JBC)

Verse 28:

Bethany -- Some manuscripts read "Bethabara" (Judges 7:24). This was probably an early "correction" of the text in these manuscripts to avoid the difficulty that the usual reading (Bethany) becomes a Transjordanian place which is attested only here in John. It is distinct from the Bethany near Jerusalem of 11:1, 18 which is also named in the Synoptics. (JBC)

In Bethany beyond Jordan -- Undoubtedly the correct text, not "in Bethabara" as Origen suggested instead of "in Bethany" of all the known Greek manuscripts under the mistaken notion that the only Bethany was that near Jerusalem. (INT)

Bethany across the Jordan -- this site is unknown. Another reading is "Bethabara." (NAB)

It is evident from 3:26 and 10:40 that there were two places named Bethany. Origen, visiting Palestine at a time when the site of Bethany beyond the Jordan was lost, is probably responsible for the textual correction in some versions of "Bethabara." (IB)

Bethabara--Rather, "Bethany" (according to nearly all the best and most ancient manuscripts); not the Bethany of Lazarus, but another of the same name, and distinguished from it as lying "beyond Jordan," on the east. (INT)

These things were done in Bethabara... That is, this testimony was bore by John; and this discourse passed between him and the Pharisees, at the place here mentioned; which was a passage over Jordan, where much people walked to go on the other side, beyond Jordan; and where also John was baptizing; which brought a great concourse of people together: so that this witness was bore in a very public manner, and before a large number; and it is to this that Christ refers, in (John 1:33) for this was so well known, that there was no hiding or denying it: the place where this conversation passed, is in the Vulgate Latin, and all the eastern versions; and in the Alexandrian copy, and many other copies. Bethany was not beyond Jordan, nor in the wilderness of Judea, but near to Jerusalem, about two miles distant from it; nor was it situated by waters convenient for baptizing, unless they went to the brook Kidron, which indeed was not far from it; but it is clear from the history, that John was not so near Jerusalem; nor did that brook which might be forded over seem fit and proper enough for plunging the bodies of those that were to be baptized. Either this reading is an error, or there was another Bethany near Jordan: Bethabara signifies "the house of passage", and is thought to be the place where the Israelites passed over Jordan, to go into the land of Canaan, (Joshua 3:16,17) . Since it must have been a very convenient place for the administration of baptism by immersion so it was very significant of the use of this ordinance; which is, as it were, the passage, or entrance, into the Gospel church state. Whether there was a place of this name, where the Israelites went over the Jordan, is not certain. If there was, it does not seem likely to be the place here designed, since that was right over against Jericho; whereas this seems to be rather further off. Over against Galilee: there were several passages of Jordan, (Judges 12:5,6) . There was a bridge over it, between the lake of Samochon and Gennesaret, now called Jacob's bridge, where Jacob is supposed to have wrestled with the angel, and to have met with his brother Esau; and there was another over it at Chainmath, near Tiberias, and in other places. It might be at one of these passages, by which they

went over into Galilee, that John decided to continue preaching and baptizing, partly because of the number of people that went over and to whom he had the opportunity of preaching, and partly for the sake of baptizing those who became proper subjects. Some have thought, that this place is the same as Bethbarah, in Judges 7:24 , which was not far from the parts where this place must be, but on this side of the Jordan. Regardless of the exact location, it was no doubt very proper for the purposes of John. Therefore he chose it, and for a while continued at it.

SESSION 14

We have now come to the presentation of Jesus' adult life, and will begin by studying his baptism by John in the Jordan River, to be followed by the lineage of Jesus.

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b. BAPTISM OF JESUS

Matthew 3:13-17

Mark 1:9-11

Luke 3:21-22

1. Read Matthew 3:13-17 entirely through one time.
2. Read Matthew 3:13-15
 - (1) No references
3. Read Matthew 3:16
 - (1) Isaiah 42:1
4. Read Matthew 3:17
 - (1) Genesis 22:2
 - (2) Psalm 2:7
 - (3) Isaiah 42:1
 - (4) Matthew 12:18
 - (5) Matthew 17:5

Matthew 3:13-17

- 13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.
- 14 John tried to prevent him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?"
- 15 Jesus said to him in reply, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed him.
- 16 After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened (for him), and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove (and) coming upon him.
- 17 And a voice came from the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Matthew depends on Mark, but has added verses 14 and 15--it was necessary to explain how Jesus could submit to a rite of repentance and confession of sin. (JBC)

The baptism of Jesus is the occasion on which he is equipped for his ministry by the holy Spirit and proclaimed to be the Son of God. (NAB)

The Synoptic Gospels picture a definite and formal beginning for Jesus' ministry at the time of the Baptism and Temptation. It seems certain that Jesus was baptized by John and shortly afterward entered for the first time upon his public activity, preaching repentance, as John had done, but adding to this his own distinctive good news. (IB)

Our oldest Gospel, Mark, depicts the vision, and perhaps the voice also, as

coming to Jesus, not to the crowd. Matthew reproduces this exactly. The story therefore rests on what must have been supposed to be Jesus' account of his own experiences, or else on a divine revelation to the author of the source. The difficulty often raised is that elsewhere Jesus gives little direct teaching about his own mission and person. It would be very natural for early Christians to assume that Jesus' ministry must have begun with such a revelation of the divine favor, whether he himself told the story or not. Or it may possibly be that the form of the story was given it by Christian reflection, while the essential kernel goes back to Jesus. If so, he told his disciples that at the Baptism he received the divine commission to begin his work. (IB)

What word would you think best describes that vocation? "Messiah," "Son of God", "Son of man," or "prophet?" We can discount the word "Messiah" as the term was then understood, because Jesus resisted the use of this title. We can't discount it, however, if "Messiah" is to be understood in our use of its transformed Christian meaning. It is best to suppose that Jesus never tried to find a name or title to describe himself and the work he had to do--he simply followed the will of God as it was revealed to him. (IB)

Verse 13:

Unlike Mark, Matthew states that Jesus' purpose in leaving Galilee was to be baptized. (IB)

The same historical present is used in Genesis 3:1. He comes all the way from Galilee to Jordan "to be baptized by him". The fame of John had reached Nazareth and the hour has come for which Jesus has waited. (INT 1)

Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. He had spent his first thirty years in privacy at Nazareth, gradually ripening for His public work, and calmly awaiting the time appointed by the Father. Now it had arrived; and this movement from Galilee to the Jordan River is the step of deepest interest to all heaven since that first one which brought Him into the world. Luke (Luke 3:21) has this important addition-- "Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus being baptized, ..." which implies that Jesus waited until all others had been baptized before He stepped forward, so that He might not seem to be merely one of the crowd. (INT 2)

Verses 14:

[tried to prevent him](#) -- The Christians of Matthew's time wondered why Jesus, whom they believed to be sinless, had submitted to a baptism, which supposed repentance. None of the gospel material suggests that Jesus had any consciousness of personal sin; but Israel as a whole needed to repent, and Jesus no doubt assumed that any righteous-minded man would associate himself with John's movement. (IB)

Apparently, the two men of destiny are face to face for the first time. The Coming One stands before John and he recognizes him before the promised sign is given. (INT 1)

[How John came to recognize Him, when he says he knew Him not, see John 1:31-34.] John evidently regarded Jesus as Himself needing no purification but rather qualified to impart it to those who did. There was no false humility nor presumption in his words. (INT 2)

Verse 15:

[to fulfill all righteousness](#) -- an obscure phrase, it very probably refers to Jesus' identification of himself, as he comes to be baptized, as a devout Jew who observes the

law and the practices associated with good Jewish life. The added dialogue introduces a confession by John of the dignity of Jesus that is not found in Mark and Luke. (JBC)

The dialogue in verses 14 and 15 is peculiar to Matthew, and reveals John's awareness of Jesus' superiority to him as the mightier one who is coming and who will baptize with the holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11). His reluctance to admit Jesus among the sinners whom he is baptizing with water is overcome by Jesus' response. **To fulfill all righteousness**-- in this gospel to fulfill usually refers to fulfillment of prophecy, and righteousness to moral conduct in conformity with God's will. Here, however, as in Matthew 5:6; 6:33, righteousness seems to mean the saving activity of God. To fulfill all righteousness is to submit to the plan of God for the salvation of the human race. This involves Jesus' identification with sinners; hence the propriety of his accepting John's baptism. (NAB)

The explanation of Jesus satisfies John and he baptizes the Messiah though he has no sins to confess. It was proper for him to do so else the Messiah would seem to hold aloof from the Forerunner. Thus the ministries of the two are linked together. (INT-1)

to fulfill all righteousness-- In his baptism as in his circumcision, presentation in the Temple, and even his total submission in Nazareth, Jesus fulfilled every ordinance, and every institution. He was in compliance with every ordinance and every institution, baptism included. Our text perhaps best brings out the force of the opening word "And." But we incline to think that our Lord meant more than this. The import of circumcision and of baptism seems to be radically the same. It is as if Jesus was saying: "I pledge Myself to the whole righteousness of the Law, symbolically do enter on and engage to fulfill it all." (INT 2)

Verse 16:

Some manuscripts and patristic quotations of this passage tell of miraculous signs accompanying the Baptism, and Luke 3:22 pictures the Spirit in visible form. Matthew merely says that **the heavens were opened (for him)**. Mark says that Jesus "saw the heavens splitting open." This, like the descent of the **Spirit of God**, was observed by Jesus, but not by the bystanders. Through the impartation of the Spirit, God turns the repentance-baptism into an ordination of Jesus for his ministry, for the Messiah must be "anointed" before he enters on his work. The **dove** is the usual rabbinical symbol for the people of Israel, and only occasionally is it identified with the Spirit. (IB)

the Spirit of God descending -- In Matthew and Mark, Jesus sees this event as the heavens open, but in Luke and John 1:32-33 the vision is extended (at least) to John. (JBC)

a dove -- Here only the symbol of the Spirit; in OT imagery the dove represents a symbol of love. (JBC)

It is not certain whether Matthew means that the Spirit of God took the form of a dove or came upon Jesus as a dove comes down. Either makes sense, but Luke (Luke 3:22) has it "in bodily form as a dove" and that is probably the idea here. The dove in Christian art has been considered the symbol of the Holy Spirit. (INT 1)

After Jesus was baptized he came out of the water. Luke adds here that he "was praying" which is a great piece of information. With the exception of John, apparently none of the by-standers witnessed the Holy Spirit in the bodily form of the dove, or at least they may have seen a dove but did not relate it to the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of John gives us one more piece of information here: “John testified ..., saying, “I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from the sky and remain upon him” (John 1:32). In case we should think that this was an accidental thing, he adds that this last particular was expressly given him as part of the sign by which he was to recognize and identify Him as the Son of God: "I did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the holy Spirit’” (John 1:33). We cannot doubt that it was this permanent and perfect resting of the Holy Spirit upon the Son of God--now and henceforward in His official capacity--that was here visibly manifested. (INT 2)

Verse 17:

This is my beloved Son -- Love is expressed in the saying formed in Isaiah 4:1 (following Mark). The use of this formula identifies Jesus as the Servant of the Lord. The vision defines the character of the messiahship of Jesus; he is not the royal conquering Messiah, rather he is the Servant who proclaims and suffers. (JBC)

The voice from heaven reflects the Jewish belief in the *bat qol* (daughter of a voice), often mentioned in rabbinical literature as the means of revelation granted after prophecy had ceased. (JBC)

This is my beloved Son-- Mark’s address to Jesus (Mark 1:11) is changed into a proclamation. The Father's voice speaks in terms that reflect Isaiah 42:1; Psalm 2:7; Genesis 22:2. (NAB)

The Rabbis told many stories of hearing “a voice from heaven.” They called it *bath qol*, “daughter (perhaps an echo) of the voice (of God).” Often the voice speaks in the words of Scripture, as it does here. “This is my ... son” is a quotation from Psalm 2:7. Mark 1:11 has it in more exact form, but Matthew directs it to the bystanders. The “beloved” is a messianic title (Ephesians 1:6). “With whom I am well pleased” is no doubt a reminiscence of Isaiah 42:1, which deals with the Servant of Yahweh, and which the Targum applies to Messiah. It can be paraphrased “This is my chosen one,” and in Enoch “Chosen One” means “Messiah.” (IB)

This was the voice of the Father to the Son whom he identifies as His Son, "my beloved Son." Thus each person of the Trinity is represented (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) at this formal entrance of Jesus upon his Messianic ministry. John heard the voice, of course, and saw the dove. It was a momentous occasion for John and for Jesus and for the whole world. The words are similar to Psalms 2:7, and the voice at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). (INT)

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5. Read Mark 1:9-11 entirely through one time.

(1) Psalm 2:7

(3) Luke 3:21-23

(2) Matthew 3:13-17

Mark 1:9-11

9 It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John

10 On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him.

11 And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

As Son of God (1:1), Jesus is made manifest at the outset of his career by what amounts to a divine epiphany. (IB)

Verse 9:

[was baptized in the Jordan by John](#) -- That Jesus submitted to John's baptism of repentance presented a theological problem to the early Church. Only Mark directly affirms that Jesus was in fact baptized by John, whereas Matthew mentions Jesus' intention to be baptized, and refers to it as an accomplished fact (Matthew 3:16; cf. Luke 3:21). John omits it altogether (John 1:32-34). (JBC)

[It happened in those days](#) -- means in the general period of John's ministry, as described in verses 4-8. Acts 13:25, as well as the Gospel of John, presupposes that it was toward the end of John's ministry. (IB)

[was baptized in the Jordan by John](#) -- proposes that the baptism took place at John's bidding. (IB)

Jesus saw the heavens parting as he came up out of the water, which is a more vivid picture than the "opened" that we find in Matthew 3:16 and Luke 3:21. Evidently the Baptist saw all this as well as the Holy Spirit coming down upon Jesus as a dove, because he later mentions it (John 1:32). (IB 1)

Verse 10:

[he saw](#) -- Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark recounts the theophany at Jesus' baptism as an apocalyptic vision seen only by Jesus. Four elements of the vision bring out the theological meaning of the event: (1) "The heavens were torn open" is an allusion to Isaiah 64:1, part of a prayer that God may inaugurate the *eschaton* as a new exodus, (2) "The Spirit coming down" is an allusion to Isaiah 63:11 and 14 where God's spirit is said to have come down upon the Israelites during the Exodus, just as in Exodus 19:11, 18, and 20 God had come down upon Sinai to form his people. (3) "Like a dove" was a symbol of Israel in the Bible (Hosea 11:11; Psalms 68:13; 74:19; 56:1 [LXX], in rabbinical commentaries, and in extra biblical writings. Jesus is thus designated as the representative of God's new people according to the Spirit. (4) "Out of the heavens came a voice" is an allusion to Isaiah 42:1 where it attests that Jesus is the unique Son of God, the Servant of Yahweh, anointed with the prophetic Spirit. By portraying this theophany as a vision seen only by Jesus, Mark keeps Jesus' true identity a secret known only to the reader. It was not shared by those present at the Jordan River. (JBC)

[on coming up out of the water](#) -- is a possible allusion to Isaiah 63:11. Thus, this event at the Jordan fulfills the longing of Isaiah and recalls the passage through the Red (or Reed) Sea, the Israelites' crossing of the Jordan under Joshua, and the new exodus announced in Isaiah 40:3-4. It has ecclesial significance--Jesus embodies the new people of God, being born in a new exodus. (JBC)

[he saw](#) -- In Mark the vision is seen by Jesus alone, and the words of the heavenly voice are addressed to him directly. (IB)

The dove was a symbol of not only gentleness and peace, or of innocence or moral purity, but also of the creative power of God -- the Spirit brooded upon the waters in the creation story (Genesis 1:2). Mark perhaps viewed this as the moment when Jesus

received his endowment with supernatural power, which was later manifested in his “mighty works.” In the Apostolic church the Holy Spirit’s coming followed baptism (Acts 19:5-6). (IB)

Verse 11:

a voice came from the heavens -- that is, the voice was from God. Jewish traditions refer to the *bath qol*, “daughter (or echo) of the voice,” that is, of God or of an angel, sometimes overheard upon earth, sometimes directly addressed to saintly men and women, and sometimes as a voice of judgment.” (IB)

You are my beloved Son -- The heavenly voice often speaks the language of Scripture. In this case it comes from Psalm 2:7 combined with Isaiah 42:1, which is modified to suit the situation. Psalm 2 was an ancient hymn for a royal accession or coronation, presumably of some king of Israel or Judah; the appropriateness of the words quoted in Mark depended upon the interpretation of the psalm as referring to King Messiah. It was evidently a favorite OT text in the early church, sometimes interpreted as referring to the “day” of Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation, but in Mark it refers to his baptism. Isaiah 42:1 is from the “servant songs.” It was another “gospel text” of the primitive church, and was interpreted -- by the church, not by the Jews -- messianically. Ancient Jewish tradition usually cited familiar texts by opening phrases or catchwords; Christian Jews would probably do the same, especially in the earliest stage of evangelic tradition, since their Bible was the OT, with which they were familiar. There can be no question that for Mark, as for the Gentile church of his day, Jesus’ divine sonship was unique, and entirely supernatural. (IB)

It is sometimes said that the account of Jesus’ baptism is the record of the birth of his messianic consciousness, or of his vocation to fulfill the prophecies of the “servant of the Lord” described in Isaiah, or of his call to be “a prophet mighty in word and deed.” However legitimate these inferences, it must be recognized that for Mark the emphasis does not lie upon an inner experience of Jesus himself, nor is to be interpreted biographically, but upon the announcement of who Jesus already is. For Mark, Jesus is more than the Jewish Messiah. Mark is not a theologian, but his thought is moving toward theology, and eventually the fuller categories of Greek theology will be required in order to do justice to his view. Undoubtedly there was some experience of divine vocation which lay behind Jesus’ ministry, but we must not force Mark’s narrative into a pattern suited to our modern reconstructions of the life of Christ. There is no suggestion in Mark that Jesus’ baptism marked the birth of his “messianic consciousness.” The modern view of our Lord’s human nature would be entirely contrary to the theology of Mark. (IB)

He saw the heavens . . . and the Spirit . . . upon him: indicating divine intervention in fulfillment of promise. Here the descent of the Spirit on Jesus is meant, anointing him for his ministry; cf. Isaiah 11:2; 42:1; 61:1; 63:9. **A voice . . . with you I am well pleased:** God’s acknowledgment of Jesus as his unique Son, the object of his love. His approval of Jesus is the assurance that Jesus will fulfill his messianic mission of salvation. (NAB)

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6. Read Luke 3:21-22 entirely through one time.

(1) Matthew 3:13-17

(2) Mark 1:9-11

7. Read Luke 3:22

(1) Psalm 2:7

(2) Isaiah 42:1

(3) Matthew 12:18

(4) Matthew 17:5

(5) Mark 9:7

(6) Luke 8:35

(7) John 1:32

(8) II Peter 1:17

Luke 3:21-22

21 After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened

22 and the holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Verse 21:

all the people had been baptized -- This stylistic device links a new episode with the preceding one about John the Baptist. Luke might also intend a fulfillment of the mission confided to John before his birth: "to prepare a perfect people for the Lord" (1:17). Men have been led to the final moment of world salvation through the baptism administered by John: they are ready to become the messianic, eschatological people of God (Acts 15:14). Luke, however, never mentions John by name in the account of Jesus' baptism. In fact he hurries over the act of Jesus' baptism. Jesus' baptism by John was more and more embarrassing for the early Church [probably because they had not yet formed an adequate conception of it; that is, to why Jesus was baptized since he was sinless], and we can watch the notice being gradually edited from the NT. Mark clearly states that Jesus was actually baptized by John, while Matthew tones it down by saying that Jesus presented himself to be baptized. In his turn, Luke removes all mention of the Baptist's name and directs attention away from the baptism itself. John gives no account whatsoever of Jesus' baptism. The theophany rather than the baptism is the focal point for Luke, who alone states that Jesus "was praying." In Luke, Jesus is often portrayed at prayer before an important decision: as in the election of the Twelve (6:12), in the confession of Peter (9:18), in the instruction on prayer (11:1), in the agony before his death (22:41), and while he was on the cross (23:46). This present moment is crucial and Messianic. (JBC)

heaven was opened -- This imagery frequently implies a vision of heavenly secrets in apocalyptic writing (Ezekiel 1:1). The strongest influence upon the present passage comes from Isaiah 63:19. Not only does the pathetic and stirring prayer of Isaiah entreat God to open the heavens, but the Greek word of Matthew and Luke closely follows the LXX of this passage. Mark, to maintain the violent rending of heaven implied by the MT, uses a different Greek word. This intensifies the eschatological tone of the baptism, for the prayer of Isaiah begs God to repeat, for one last time, the great redemptive acts toward his people, especially the Exodus out of bondage. Jesus' baptism, therefore, answers that prayer and envisages a whole community advancing to the new and most joyful promised land. Jesus' baptism, however, remains more of a promise to be fulfilled at Pentecost when the heavens will open again and the Spirit will descend upon the community (Acts 2). John takes a different viewpoint; the heavens remain open and

heavenly beings are essentially descending upon Jesus throughout his entire ministry (1:51). (JBC)

was praying -- Luke regularly presents Jesus at prayer at important points in his ministry: here at his baptism; at the choice of the Twelve (Luke 6:12); before Peter's confession (Luke 9:18); at the transfiguration (Luke 9:28); when he teaches his disciples to pray (Luke 11:1); at the Last Supper (Luke 22:32); on the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:41); on the cross (Luke 23:46). (NAB)

Luke does not say that all the people were baptized before Jesus came or were baptized at the same time. It is merely a general statement that Jesus was baptized in connection with or at the time of the baptizing of the people as a whole. In Luke's account, the baptism of Jesus is merely introductory to the descent of the Holy Spirit and the voice of the Father. Luke alone mentions that Jesus was praying at the baptism as he often mentions the praying of Jesus. The heaven was opened while Jesus was praying, although it was not necessarily in answer to his prayer. (INT 1)

Verse 22:

the holy Spirit -- The Messianic gift to be bestowed on the Church at Pentecost. (JBC)

in bodily form -- These words, found only in Luke, move the discussion away from the apocalyptic vision of Mark and Matthew, the description of which approximates Ezekiel (1:4-5) and Daniel (7:4-5), which speak of "someone or something like the appearance of ..." Later writers will further enhance the external phenomena accompanying the baptism. (JBC)

like a dove -- Representing the new people of Israel, the eschatological community. The oldest traditions make this comparison: Hosea 11:1; Psalm 68:14. Some explain the dove as a symbol of the Spirit, but this symbolism is not explicitly present in the Bible, but is found only in late rabbinic literature. We find again, therefore, the eschatological aspect of the community and a prefigurement of Pentecost in the baptism episode. (JBC)

One might ask: Was there an actual dove? The earliest tradition in Mark implies an apocalyptic style in which visions and symbolism constitute major features of the literary medium. Symbols communicate the hidden qualities of an impelling reality. That reality, in the baptism of Jesus, was the burning conviction that the Father impressed upon his mind--that world salvation was under way and the final age imminent. By the phrase "dove in bodily form," Luke intends to say that Jesus could almost reach out and touch the new community taking shape around him, especially when Pentecost would achieve the promise of Jesus' baptism. (JBC)

a voice came from heaven -- This is a common Biblical style, occurring in various modalities, which indicates that a message or an action expresses God's hopes and determination (Exodus 19:9; I Samuel 3:4ff.; 7:10; Psalm 29). (JBC)

"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" -- Many scholars accept the reading "you are my son, the dearly loved one; in you I am well pleased" which is supported by the major NT manuscripts. But the Western Text changes the verse to read: "you are my son; this day I have begotten you." A large number of scholars prefer this latter reading. The former reading, however, is preferred not only because of textual evidence in the manuscripts, but also because Luke otherwise reserves Psalm 2 (and its

reference to the royal glorification of Jesus) for the moment of his ascension and Pentecost (Acts 2:29-36; 13:33). According to the preferred reading, the heavenly voice proclaims over Jesus what was once announced to the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 42:1. Because the Servant is both an ideal individual and the representative of the corporate community, Jesus is declared to be thoroughly incarnate in the eschatological community, even to the point of being baptized as they were; but he also combines in the uniqueness of his person and mission their highest ideals and hopes. Because of his total union with all human weakness, the Servant Jesus must descend into human death, so as to infuse a new life into every area of man's existence. This association of Jesus' baptism with his later death and resurrection comes clearly to the fore in Luke 12:50 (= Mark 10:38). The first Servant Song (Isaiah 42:1-4) enables us to understand Jesus' baptism as a solemn investiture in the prophetic role of establishing righteousness (that is, the fulfillment of divine promises) all over the earth. The words "my son" are a deliberate NT substitution for the Hebrew word meaning "servant" and the LXX word meaning "boy". The expression "my son" complemented by the earlier reference to the Holy Spirit seem in Luke to be a confession of Jesus' divinity. (JBC)

[You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased](#) -- is the best attested reading in the Greek manuscripts. The Western reading, "You are my Son, this day I have begotten you," is derived from Psalm 2:7. (NAB)

In his rephrasing of Mark, Luke fails to note specifically that Jesus was baptized by John, but there is little reason to conclude from this that he was troubled by the tradition. Matthew felt he had to explain it (3:14-15), and John omitted it altogether. Luke's interest in Jesus' prayer life may have been responsible for the introduction of the words "and was praying", but they also served to accommodate Jesus' example to the rite as it was practiced in the later church. The gift of the Holy Spirit (the adjective "Holy" is Luke's addition) does not automatically follow upon baptism, but is associated with the act of prayer--in Acts 8:15-17 with prayer and "the laying on of hands." In Mark it is possible to interpret the baptismal experience as one personal to Jesus himself ("he saw the heavens opened"), but in Luke it is externalized (the heaven was opened). Furthermore the descent of the Holy Spirit becomes a miracle--in bodily form. In early rabbinical literature the sound of a voice ... from heaven is likened to the cooing of a dove, and Luke may have been employing familiar symbolism in his simile. The evangelist accepts the view that Jesus was Messiah from the moment of his miraculous conception, but the earlier Christological interpretation of the baptism as the time when he became God's Son is still apparent in the words of the heavenly voice that are quoted from Mark. (IB)

The Holy Spirit. Mark 1:10 has merely the Spirit, while Matthew 3:16 has the Spirit of God. In a bodily form is found only in Luke who also has "as a dove" like Matthew and Mark. This probably means that the Baptist saw the vision that looked like a dove. Nothing is gained by denying the fact or possibility of the vision that looked like a dove. God manifests his power as he will. The symbolism of the dove for the Holy Spirit is intelligible. But this fresh influx of the Holy Spirit may have deepened the Messianic consciousness of Jesus and certainly revealed him to the Baptist as God's Son. [And a voice came out of heaven](#) -- The voice of the Father to the Son is given here as it is in Mark 1:11. The Trinity here manifest themselves at the baptism of Jesus which

constitutes the formal entrance of Jesus upon his Messianic ministry. He enters upon it with the Father's blessing and approval, and with the power of the Holy Spirit upon him. The deity of Christ here appears in plain form in the Synoptic Gospels. The consciousness of Christ is as clear on this point here as in the Gospel of John where the Baptist describes him, after his baptism, as the Son of God (John 1:34). (IB)

Summary of the Baptism of Jesus from LToJC:

Although it seems that there was no personal acquaintance between Jesus and John (how could there have been, since their spheres lay so widely apart), each must have heard and known of the other. There have been thirty years of silence of which we have been told very little. When the two met, and perhaps had a brief conversation, each bore himself in accordance with his previous history.

With John, it was deepest, reverent humility--even to the verge of misunderstanding his special mission, and work of initiation and preparation for the Kingdom. He had heard of Jesus before by the hearing of the ear. When he saw him now with that look of quiet dignity, it made him forget even the express command of God to preach and baptize.

For Jesus, it was the for the fulfillment of all righteousness. From earliest ages there has been a question on many minds -- Why did Jesus go to be baptized? The heretical Gospels put into the mouth of the Virgin Mother an invitation to go to that baptism, to which Jesus is supposed to have replied by pointing to his own sinlessness. In answer to the question on many minds, John's baptism was in itself only a consecration to, and preparatory initiation for, the new Covenant of the Kingdom. As applied to sinful man it is indeed necessarily a "baptism of repentance", but not as applied to the sinless Jesus.

Most important of all, we must not seek for any ulterior motive in the coming of Jesus to this baptism. He had no ulterior motive of any kind. It was a simple act of obedient submissiveness on the part of the Perfect One--and submissive obedience has no motive beyond itself. It asks no reasons; it cherishes no ulterior purpose. This was the "fulfillment of all righteousness." And it was in perfect harmony with all his previous life. It seems as if Jesus' thoughts were always on the Divine, rather than the human self, which were apparently necessarily connected with the human development of Jesus, some corresponding outward event was always the occasion of a fresh advance in the Messianic consciousness and work. The first event of that kind had been his appearance in the Temple at the age of twelve. These two things then stood out vividly before him, not in the ordinary sense, but rather in the Messianic sense--that the Temple was the House of his Father, and that to be busy about it was his Life's work. With this he returned to Nazareth, and in willing subjection to his parents fulfilled all righteousness. Still, as he grew in years, in wisdom, and in favor with God and man, this thought--this burning consciousness, was the inmost spring of his life. What this business especially was, he didn't know yet, but he waited to learn. He waited to learn the how and when of his life-consecration. He left unasked and unanswered in the still waiting period of development. In this also we see the sinless, the Perfect One.

When tidings of John's baptism reached his home, there could have been no haste on his part. Even with the knowledge of all that concerned John's relation to him, there

was in the “fulfillment of all righteousness” that quiet waiting. The one question with him was, “The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven, or of man (Matthew 21:25). Once that question was answered, there could then no longer be any hesitation. He went, not for any ulterior purpose, nor from any other motive than that it was of God. He went voluntarily because it was of God, and because it became him to “fulfill all righteousness.” There is this great difference between his going to that baptism, and afterwards in the wilderness. In the baptism, His act was of preconceived purpose; in the temptations it was not so, because he was driven--without previous purpose to that effect --under the constraining power of the Spirit. There he went without premeditation and resolve to do it, without even having any knowledge of its objective. In the one case he was active, in the other passive; in the one he fulfilled all righteousness; in the other his righteousness was tried. It was on his first visit to the Temple, that this consciousness about his life-business came to him in his Father’s House, then it ripened slowly and fully throughout those long years of quiet submission and growing wisdom and grace at Nazareth. At his baptism, with the accompanying descent and abiding in him of the Holy Spirit, and with the heard testimony of his Father, the knowledge came to him, and with that knowledge, the qualification for the business of his Father’s House. In that later hour he learned the *when*, and in part the *how*, of his life-business. The remainder of the *how* he was to learn gradually. In man the subjective and the objective, alike intellectually and morally, are always separate; in God they are one. What He is, that He wills. And in the God-Man also we must not separate the subjective and the objective. The consciousness of the *when* and the *how* of his life-business was necessarily accompanied while he prayed (by the descent and the abiding in him of the Holy Spirit) and by the testifying Voice from Heaven. His inner knowledge was real qualification--the forthbursting of his power. And it was inseparably accompanied by outward qualification, in what took place at his baptism.

The first step to all was his voluntary descent to the Jordan River, and in it the fulfilling of all righteousness. His previous life had been that of the Perfect Ideal Israelite--believing, unquestioning, and submissive--in preparation for that which, in his twelfth year, he had learned as its business. The baptism of Jesus was the last act of his private life. Emerging from the waters in prayer, he learned *when* his business was to commence, and *how* it would be done.

That one outstanding thought of “I must be about my Father’s business” which had been the principle of his Nazareth life, had come to full ripeness when he knew that John’s cry of “the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” was from God. The first great question was now answered. His Father’s business was the Kingdom of Heaven. It only remained for him “to be about it” and in this determination he went to submit to its initiatory rite of baptism. As we understand it we have distinct evidence that “all the people had been baptized” when Jesus came to John. The two met alone, probably for the first time in their lives. Over that which passed between them the Holy Scripture has laid the veil of reverent silence regarding the beginning and outcome of their meeting, which is not necessary for us to know. Even when he knew Him, that was not enough. Not remembrance of what he had heard and of past transactions, nor the overwhelming power of that spotless purity and majesty of willing submission, were sufficient. For so great a witness as that which John was to bear, a present and visible demonstration from heaven

was to be given. Not that God sent the Spirit-Dove, or heaven uttered its voice for the purpose of giving this as a sign to John. These manifestations were necessary in themselves and would have taken place quite irrespective of the Baptist. Yet while they were necessary in themselves, they were also to be a sign to John. Perhaps this may explain why the Gospel of John seems to describe the scene as enacted before the Baptist, while the others (Matthew and Mark) tell it as if only visible to Jesus. Matthew and Mark bear reference to the “record,” while John bears reference to the deeper and absolutely necessary fact which underlay that “record.”

We can understand how what he knew of Jesus, and what he now saw and heard, must have overwhelmed John with the sense of Christ’s transcendentally higher dignity, and led him to hesitate about, if not to refuse, administering the rite of baptism. Not because it was “the baptism of repentance”, but because he stood in the presence of him whose “straps he was not worthy to loosen.” Had he not felt this way, the narrative would have been psychologically true. Furthermore, had it not been recorded, we would have serious difficulty in accepting it. Yet when John “forbid” him and even suggested his own baptism by Jesus, John forgot and misunderstood his own mission. John himself was never to be baptized; he only held open the door of the new Kingdom; he himself never entered into it. The lowliest place on earth seems to always conjoin with the greatest work for God. Simply putting aside John’s objection since He had come to “fulfill all righteousness”, Jesus followed the hand that pointed him to the open door of the Kingdom.

Jesus stepped out of the baptismal waters praying. One prayer, the only one which he taught his disciples, might here recur in our minds. We must individualize and emphasize in their special application its opening sentences: “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, as it is in heaven.” The first thought and the first petition had been the conscious outcome of the Temple-visit, ripened during the long years at Nazareth. The others were now the full expression of His submission, to the baptism. He knew his mission; he had consecrated himself to it in his baptism-- “Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” The unlimited petition for the doing of God’s will on earth with the same absoluteness as in heaven, *was* his self-consecration. “Father who art in Heaven” was his confession; “Hallowed be thy name” was the eulogy. *How* this will, connected with the Kingdom, was to be done by him, and *when* it was to be done he was to learn after his baptism.

As the prayer of Jesus winged heavenward, his solemn response to the call of the Kingdom was “Here I am; I come to do your will.” The response came at the same time as the predicted sign to the Baptist. Heaven seemed to open itself wide, while in bodily shape like a dove the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus and remained on him. Here, at these waters, was the Kingdom into which Jesus had entered in the fulfillment of all righteousness; and from them, he emerged as the Heaven-designated, Heaven-qualified, and Heaven-proclaimed King. As such he had received the fullness of the Spirit for his Messianic work--a fullness that was abiding in him so that out of it we might receive, grace upon grace. As such also the voice from Heaven proclaimed it, to him and to John: “Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” The ratification of the great Davidic promise, the announcement of the fulfillment of its predictive import in Psalm 2 was God’s solemn declaration of Jesus as the Messiah--His public proclamation of it, and

the beginning of Jesus' Messianic work. This is how the Baptist understood it when he witnessed that Jesus was the Son of God.

If there is no reality to this narrative, where did the invention of the legend come from? It certainly had no basis in contemporary Jewish teaching. It is equally certain that it would not have spontaneously occurred in the Jewish mind. There is nowhere in Rabbinic literature that we find any hint of a baptism of the Messiah, nor of a descent upon Him of the Spirit, in the form of a dove. Rather such views would have been seen as repugnant to Jewish thinking. This history has no basis in existing Jewish belief. Its origin cannot, therefore, be rationally accounted for. When Jesus came to the Jordan River, he came to "fulfill all righteousness". His Divine consciousness answered his question of "Was the baptism of John of Heaven, or of man." The answer he received was that it came from heaven, and was not of man.

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c. LINEAGE OF JESUS

Luke 3:23-38
Matthew 1:2-17

8. Read Luke 3:23-38 entirely through one time
(1) Matthew 1:2-17
9. Read Luke 3:23
(1) Luke 4:22 (2) John 6:42
10. Read Luke 3:24-26
(1) No references
11. Read Luke 3:27
(1) 1 Chronicles 3:17 (2) Ezekiel 3:2
12. Read Luke 3:28-30
(1) No references
13. Read Luke 3:31
(1) II Samuel 5:14
14. Read Luke 3:31-32
(1) I Samuel 16:1 and 18
15. Read Luke 3:31-33
(1) Ruth 4:17-22 (2) I Chronicles 2:1-15
16. Read Luke 3:33
(1) Genesis 29:35 (2) Genesis 38:29

17. Read Luke 3:34
 (1) Genesis 21:3 (3) I Chronicles 1:34
 (2) Genesis 25:26 (4) I Chronicles 28:34
18. Read Luke 3:34-36
 (1) Genesis 11:10-26 (2) I Chronicles 1:24-27
19. Read Luke 3:36-38
 (1) Genesis 4:25 - 5:32 (2) I Chronicles 1:1-4

Luke 3:23-38

- 23 When Jesus began his ministry he was about thirty years of age. He was the son,
 as was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli,
 24 the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son
 of Joseph,
 25 the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son
 of Naggai,
 26 the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the
 son of Joda,
 27 the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel,
 the son of Neri,
 28 the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the
 son of Er,
 29 the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son
 of Levi,
 30 the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son
 of Eliakim,
 31 the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the
 son of David,
 32 the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of
 Nahshon,
 33 the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the
 son of Perez, the son of Judah,
 34 the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son
 of Nahor,
 35 the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of
 Shelah,
 36 the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son
 of Lamech,
 37 the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel,
 the son of Cainan,
 38 the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

The genealogies of Jesus in the NT raise many problems when they are compared.
 Luke proceeds backward from Jesus to Adam; Matthew, however, moves forward from

Abraham to Jesus. Luke's procedure is more normal, to start with the contemporary representatives of a family and work backward (Numbers 27:1; I Samuel 27:1; Zephaniah 1:1). Like Matthew, Luke also makes use of the number seven; there are eleven series of seven names (with some variation in the Syriac and Latin manuscripts). Only Luke provides the names from Abraham to Adam (depending on Genesis 5:3-32; 11:10-26 [according to the LXX, which alone has the name Cainan]). Between Abraham and David, Matthew and Luke agree, except that Luke adds Arni. Between David and Jesus, Matthew and Luke completely disagree, except for the rare names, Zerubbabel and Shealtiel. (JBC)

Various explanations for these differences are given, none of which are convincing: for example, that Matthew makes use of the levirate marriage and gives legal or royal descent (Deuteronomy 25:5-10), whereas Luke adheres to blood descent. Every solution must recognize both the highly artificial literary style of ancient genealogies and the religious purpose of the writer. Genealogies can be a literary device for spanning unknown centuries (Genesis 5) or for insinuating the renown of one's ancestors (cf. the age of the patriarchs in Genesis 5). In Matthew, the term "beget" can be a literary way of connecting two names, as happens when the Evangelist omits three names and tells of Joram begetting his great-great grandson Uzziah. (JBC)

Whereas Matthew begins the genealogy of Jesus with Abraham to emphasize Jesus' bonds with the people of Israel, Luke's universalism leads him to trace the descent of Jesus beyond Israel to Adam and beyond that to God (Luke 3:38) to stress again Jesus' divine sonship. (NAB)

Some suggest that we have in Luke the lineage of Mary, whereas in Matthew we have that of (in other words, in Luke we have His real lineage, whereas in Matthew we have His reputed lineage). If Luke gives the lineage of Mary it will explain the statement about Joseph, that he was "the son of Heli," to mean that he was his son-in-law, as the husband of his daughter Mary (as in Ruth 1:11,12). It would also explain the introduction of Joseph's name instead of Mary's to conform with the Jewish custom in such tables. This view perhaps has the fewest difficulties, and it certainly is the best supported. On comparing the two genealogies, it will be found that Matthew, writing more immediately for the Jews, decided it was enough to show that the Savior was sprung from Abraham and David; whereas Luke, writing more immediately for the Gentiles, traces the descent back to Adam, the parent stock of the whole human family, thus showing Him to be the promised "Seed of the woman." (INT-2)

Verse 23:

[When Jesus began his ministry](#) -- The genealogy opens with a problematic expression. Perhaps we should translate this verse as: "When he was about 30-years old, Jesus was beginning [his manifestation]." It is a reference to the "beginning" of the final stage of salvation. (JBC)

Luke emphasizes that his estimate of "thirty years of age" is not to be taken too strictly. (IB)

Early in the third century the theory was current that Matthew's genealogy symbolized Christ's royalty, and Luke's his priesthood. Some of the more notable variations are: (1) 56 names to Abraham instead of 42; (2) [Heli](#) instead of "Jacob" as Jesus' grandfather; (3) 7 different immediate ancestors of Zerubbabel; (4) Neri instead of

Jechoniah as the father of Shealtiel; and (5) Jesus' descent traced through Nathan instead of Solomon. It is also noteworthy that Luke carries Jesus' lineage back from Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, to Adam, the father of the human race. (IB)

Both (Luke's genealogy and Matthew's) date from a time when it was important for the church to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah of Jewish expectation by proving that he was descended from David. When the new religion began to attract non-Jews in numbers, this christological argument was subordinated to others more likely to appeal to Gentiles. Nevertheless, Luke incorporates this version of the account of Jesus' supernatural generation--he no longer believes it proves anything. The parenthesis (as was supposed) is his editorial apology for doing so, and at the same time it is evidence that the list as a whole was not Luke's own compilation. Two methods of glossing over the conflict between the genealogy and the birth narratives are still employed: (1) Luke gives the genealogy of Mary rather than of Joseph, according to some Roman Catholic exegetes; and (2) Jesus was legally Joseph's son, according to some Protestant exegetes. (IB)

He was the son, as was thought, -- Another problem is met in this phrase, "as was supposed, believed," which modifies the statement that Jesus was the son of Joseph. A number of scholars claim that the words were added later to support the virginal

conception of Jesus; however, one scholar notes that not only do all the manuscripts contain the words, but that even if the words had not been present, the genealogy of Jesus does not depend on carnal descent but on the spiritual ancestry derived from God himself. (JBC)

Luke does not commit himself definitely to precisely thirty years as the age of Christ. The Levites entered upon full service at that age, but that proves nothing about Jesus. God's prophets enter upon their task when the word of God comes to them. Jesus may have been a few months under or over thirty or a year or two less or more. Luke's and Matthew's genealogies differ very widely and many theories have been proposed about them. At once one notices that Luke begins with Jesus and goes back to Adam, the Son of God, while Matthew begins with Abraham and comes to "Joseph the husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ" (Matthew 1:16). Matthew employs the word "begot" each time, while Luke does not use this form. They agree in the mention of Joseph, but Matthew says that "Jacob begat Joseph" while Luke calls "Joseph the son of Heli." There are other differences, but this one makes one pause. Joseph, of course, did not have two fathers. If we understand Luke to be giving the real genealogy of Jesus through Mary, the matter is simple enough. The two genealogies differ from Joseph to David except in the cases of Zerubbabel and Shealtiel. (INT-1)

Luke evidently means to suggest something unusual in his genealogy by the use of the phrase "as was supposed". His own narrative in Luke 1:26-38 has shown that Joseph was not the actual father of Jesus. In neither list does Matthew or Luke give a complete genealogy. Just as Matthew uses "begat" for descent, so does Luke employ "son" in the same way for descendant. It was natural for Matthew, writing for Jews, to give the legal genealogy through Joseph, although he took pains to show in Matthew 1:16,18-25 that Joseph was not the actual father of Jesus. It was equally natural for Luke, a Greek himself and writing for the whole world, to give the actual genealogy of Jesus through

Mary. It is in harmony with the universality theme of Paul, that Luke carries the genealogy back to Adam and does not stop with Abraham. It is not clear why Luke adds "the Son of God" after Adam (Matthew 3:38). Certainly he does not mean that Jesus is the Son of God only in the sense that Adam is. Possibly he wishes to dispose of the heathen myths about the origin of man and to show that God is the Creator of the whole human race, Father of all men in that sense. No mere animal origin of man is in harmony with this conception. (INT-1)

Verse 31:

The son of Nathan, the son of David: in keeping with Jesus' prophetic role in Luke and Acts (e.g., Luke 7:16, 39; 9:8; 13:33; 24:19; Acts 3:22-23; 7:37) Luke traces Jesus' Davidic ancestry through the prophet Nathan (see 2 Sam 7:2) rather than through King Solomon, as Matthew 1:6-7. (NAB)

Verse 37:

Cainan -- is derived from the LXX rather than the MT of Genesis 10:24. (IB)

Verse 38:

Adam, the son of God -- This phrase reveals Luke's religious purpose; he stresses the divine origin of the human race, with a universalism that does more than seek to bring salvation to all men. It sees divine sonship already present among them and waiting to be fully realized through Jesus, to whom the Father had just announced for all to hear "you are my son." (JBC)

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20. Read Matthew 1:2-17 entirely through one time.

(1) Luke 3:23-38

21. Read Matthew 1:2

(1) Genesis 21:3

(3) Genesis 29:35

(2) Genesis 25:26

(4) I Chronicles 2:1

22. Read Matthew 1:3

(1) Genesis 38:29-30

(3) I Chronicles 2:1

(2) Ruth 4:18

23. Read Matthew 1:4

(1) Ruth 4:19-20

(2) I Chronicles 2:4-9

24. Read Matthew 1:5

(1) Ruth 4:21-22

(2) I Chronicles 2:11-12

25. Read Matthew 1:6

(1) II Samuel 12:24

(3) I Chronicles 3:5

(2) I Chronicles 2:15

26. Read Matthew 1:7-11

(1) II Kings 25:1-21

(2) I Chronicles 3:10-15

27. Read Matthew 1:12-16
(1) I Chronicles 3:16-19

Matthew 1:2-17

- 2 Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.
- 3 Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram,
- 4 Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon,
- 5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse,
- 6 Jesse the father of David the king. David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah.
- 7 Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asaph.
- 8 Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah.
- 9 Uzziah became the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah.
- 10 Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, 4 Amos the father of Josiah.
- 11 Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile.
- 12 After the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,
- 13 Zerubbabel the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor,
- 14 Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud,
- 15 Eliud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob,
- 16 Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah.
- 17 Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

The purpose of Matthew's genealogy is to show that Jesus is the Messiah (verses 1 and 16), the term of the history of salvation that was begun with the promises of Abraham. The genealogy is deliberately compiled in 3 sets of 14 names (verse 17); 14 is a multiple of 7. It is divided at the two critical points of Israelite history, the foundation of the monarch of David and the collapse of the monarchy of Judah in the Babylonian conquest of 587 B.C. The artificiality of the names is maintained by the omission of the names of Ahaziah, Jehoash, and Amaziah between Jehoram and Uzziah; the queen

Athaliah was regarded as a usurper, and she would not have figured in the genealogy in any case. Matthew follows the line of the kings of Judah; Luke follows a common ancestors line. Matthew's genealogy up to Zerubbabel could be formed by copying from a text of OT books; for the rest of the genealogy, there is no documentary source with which we can compare it. (JBC)

Four women appear in the genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. No principle governs their inclusion. Tamar deceived her father-in-law Judah into an incestuous union (Genesis 38). In folklore, Rahab was the prostitute of Jericho who sheltered the spies and was admitted to the Israelite community (Joshua 2). Ruth, the heroine of the Book of Ruth, was a Moabite who joined the Israelite community. Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah and the partner of David's adultery. The only common element (probable, but less clear for Bathsheba) is that they were foreigners. (JBC)

The number 14 in the third group can be maintained only by including Mary or by counting Jesus and Christ as two; it is possible that a name was omitted in the early transmission of the text. One could explain the inclusion of Mary because of the virgin birth, clearly declared in the following passages of Matthew. If Jesus and Christ are counted as two, the duality could be understood as referring to his nativity in the flesh and to his Second Coming; such an eschatological allusion is common in Matthew. (JBC)

The reconciliation of the divergent genealogies of Matthew and Luke already was a celebrated problem in patristic times. Reconciliation assumes that both genealogies are compiled from reliable records. It is known that genealogies were kept in the post-exilic Jewish community; but this not prove that genealogies were available to Matthew and Luke. It is much simpler to suppose that each genealogy was compiled artificially where the biblical record failed or where Luke, for reasons of his own, chose to follow the line of the kings of Judah. (JBC)

Matthew's purpose is to prove that Jesus is the rightful Messiah according to Jewish law by showing his descent from Abraham, from David, and from the kings of Judah, and from Zerubbabel, head of the Jewish community in the postexilic period (Haggadah 2:23; Zehcariah 3:8; 4:6-14). The list of ancestors may originally have been compiled by a Jewish Christian who believed that Jesus was "son of David" through Joseph and who perhaps regarded James the Lord's brother and others of Jesus' family as the appropriate leaders of the church after the Resurrection. (IB)

Many Jewish families possessed genealogies which were accurate for a number of generations. Such lists were necessary for a number of purposes; for example, to establish priestly descent. Matthew's genealogy, with its scheme of 14, shows signs of being artificially constructed. The 14 may originally have been accidental; but appearing in the list are errors which a careful compiler would not have made, or which, if present in his source, he could easily have corrected from the Bible. Luke's genealogy, by contrast, appears more genuine and more true to the facts. It contains 42 names after David's instead of Matthew's 27, and Luke traces the descent, not through kings, but through David's son Nathan (II Samuel 5:14) and many obscure people, although Shealtiel and Zerubbabel also appear. (IB)

Matthew's list, down through Zerubbabel, probably is based on the LXX text of I Chronicles 1 - 3. (IB)

Matthew probably obtained his list from a source instead of compiling it himself.

If he himself had “searched the scriptures,” it is likely he would have done so more carefully. The genealogy does not harmonize well with his doctrine of the Virgin Birth. No doubt he was able to use it as further evidence of Jesus’ messiahship only by interpreting it as a legal, not a physical, genealogy. (IB)

Verse 2:

The word “begat”, as in some versions, does not always mean immediate parentage, but merely direct descent. (INT-1)

Verse 3:

[the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar](#) -- Women were not usually mentioned in Jewish genealogies, but Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba are included here, as well as Tamar. Jewish legend celebrated Tamar and Ruth as ancestors of Messiah, vindicated Bathsheba as far as possible, and praised Rahab. Yet Ruth was a foreigner and scandals were attached to the other names. The thought behind this was that the God of Israel, in his infinite power and love, could make great kings out of the descendants of even these women. (IB)

Verse 5:

[Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab](#) -- Rahab belonged to the much earlier times of Joshua, who, according to Jewish tradition, was her husband. (IB)

Verse 7:

The successor of Abijah was not Asaph but Asa (see 1 Chron 3:10). Some textual witnesses read the latter name; however, Asaph is better attested. Matthew may have deliberately introduced the psalmist Asaph into the genealogy (and in Matthew 1:10 the prophet Amos) in order to show that Jesus is the fulfillment not only of the promises made to David (see 2 Sam 7) but of all the Old Testament. (NAB)

Verse 10:

[Amos](#) -- This reading of the critical text stems from an early confusion of the name King Amon with the name of the prophet Amos. (JBC)

Amos: some textual witnesses read Amon, who was the actual successor of Manasseh (see 1 Chron 3:14). (NAB)

Verse 12:

[Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel](#) -- Some LXX manuscripts have this reading of I Chronicles 3:19, but according to the Hebrew of this verse, Zerubbabel is son of Jechoniah’s other son Pedaiah. (IB)

Verse 17:

Matthew is concerned with fourteen generations, probably because fourteen is the numerical value of the Hebrew letters forming the name of David. In the second section of the genealogy (Matthew 1:6b-11), three kings of Judah, Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah, have been omitted (see 1 Chron 3:11-12), so that there are fourteen generations in that section. Yet the third (Matthew 1:12-16) apparently has only thirteen. Since Matthew here emphasizes that each section has fourteen, it is unlikely that the thirteen of the last was due to his oversight. Some scholars suggest that Jesus who is called the Messiah (Matthew 1:16b) doubles the final member of the chain: Jesus, born within the family of David, opens up the new age as Messiah, so that in fact there are fourteen generations in the third section. This is perhaps too subtle, and the hypothesis of a slip not on the part of Matthew but of a later scribe seems likely. (NAB)

SESSION 15

The historical part of John's Gospel begins after the temptation; that is, with the actual ministry of Christ because it was not the purpose of John's Gospel to detail an earlier history. That had already been done sufficiently by the Synoptists. If Mark only summarizes, he also supplies the two-fold notice that Jesus was "driven out into the wilderness" and was with the "wild beasts." Mark's account is in fullest internal agreement with the detailed narratives of Matthew and Luke. The only noteworthy difference between Matthew and Luke is that Matthew places the Temple-temptation before that of the world-kingdom while Luke inverts this order. To Matthew we owe the notice that after the temptation, angels came and ministered to Jesus; to Luke we owe the notice that after the temptation, the tempter only departed from him for a season.

Judaism never conceived of a Messiah like Jesus. Previous biblical teaching and even the psychological necessity of the case, must have pointed to temptation and victory as the condition of spiritual greatness. There could be no crown of victory without a previous contest; there could have been no moral ideal without personal attainment and personal testing. The patriarchs had been tried and proved; so had Moses, and all the heroes of faith in Israel. Rabbinical legend, enlarging upon the biblical narratives, has much to tell of the original envy of the angels; of the assaults of Satan upon Abraham when about to offer up Isaac; of attempted resistance by the angels to Israel's reception of the Law; and of the final vain endeavor of Satan to take away the soul of Moses. Foolish, repulsive, and even blasphemous as some of these legends are, this much at the very least clearly stands out--spiritual trials must precede spiritual elevation. In their own language: "the Holy One, blessed be his Name, does not elevate a man to dignity until he has first tried and searched him; and if he stands in temptation, then he raises him to dignity."

That was the case in regards to man. But in reference to the Messiah there is not a hint of any temptation or assault by Satan. It is of such importance to mark this clearly at the outset of this history, that proof must be offered even at this stage. In whatever manner negative critics may seek to account for the introduction of Christ's temptation at the commencement of his ministry, it cannot have been derived from Jewish legend. Rather, in Jewish thought Satan is represented as overwhelmed and falling on his face at the sight of the Messiah, and admitting his complete defeat. On another point in this history, we find the same inversion of thought current in Jewish legend. The placing of the Messiah on the pinnacle of the Temple, so far from being of Satanic temptation, is said to mark the hour of deliverance, of Messianic proclamation, and of Gentile voluntary submission. [Needless to say, Jesus would have been aware of these legends.]

The quotations from Isaiah 60:1 and 2 and Zechariah 8:23 are important. They show that such ideas were present to the Jewish mind, but in a sense they were opposite to the Gospel-narratives. In other words, they were regarded as the rightful manifestation of Messiah's dignity; whereas in the Evangelic record they are presented as the suggestions of Satan, and the temptation of Christ. Thus the Messiah of Judaism is the Anti-Christ of the Gospels.

If the narratives cannot be traced to Jewish legend, may it not be an adaptation of OT narrative, such as the account of the forty days' fast of Moses on the mount, or of Elijah in the wilderness? Viewing the OT in its unity, and the Messiah as the apex in the

column of its history, we might, or rather we must expect, throughout points of correspondence between Moses, Elijah, and the Messiah. Moses was its giver, Elijah its restorer, the Messiah its renewer and perfecter. That neither Moses nor Elijah were assailed by Satan constitutes not the only, though a vital, difference between the fast of Moses and Elijah, and that of Jesus. Moses fasted in the middle, Elijah at the end, and Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. Moses fasted in the presence of God, Elijah fasted alone; Jesus was assaulted by Satan. Moses had been called up by God; Elijah had gone forth in the bitterness of his own spirit; Jesus was driven by the Spirit. Moses failed after his forty days' fast, when in indignation he cast the Tables of the Law from him; Elijah failed before his forty days' fast; Jesus was assailed for forty days and endured the trial. Moses was angry against Israel; Elijah despaired of Israel; Jesus overcome for Israel.

To each the trial came not only in his human, but in his representative capacity--as giver, restorer, or perfecter of the Covenant. When Moses and Elijah failed, it was not only as individuals, but as giving or restoring the covenant. And when Jesus conquered, it was not only as the unfallen and perfect man, but as the Messiah. His temptation and victory therefore have a twofold aspect: the general human and the Messianic, and these two are closely connected. We can infer from all this that whatever Jesus overcame, we also can overcome. Each victory which he gained secures its fruits for us who are His disciples, both objectively and subjectively. We walk in his foot-prints. He is the perfect man; and as each temptation marks a human assault (assault on humanity), it also marks a human victory (of humanity). But he is also the Messiah; and the assault and the victory were of the Messiah. Each victory of humanity becomes a victory for humanity.

There is another consideration that is necessary to this study. Should we regard the Evangelic narrative as the account of a real and outward event, or not? If so, how was it possible that Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, was tempted by the devil?

Let's first look at the reality and outwardness of the temptation of Jesus. Several suggestions have been offered as to set it aside as being unnatural because of its difficulty. Yet would it have not been better and wiser to simply have rejected the authenticity of it, rather than having it transformed as something so unspeakably grand. Such an event at the beginning of Christ's ministry is credible, and it is therefore almost a necessity. Throughout the Gospels there is not only allusion to his first great conflict, but there is also constant reference to the power of Satan in the world, as a kingdom that is opposed to that of God, and of which the Devil is the King. The reality of such a kingdom of evil no earnest mind would call in question, nor would it pronounce as a matter of fact against the personality of its king. Its credibility rests on the same kind of evidence as that of the beneficent Author of all Good. Finding it impossible to trace the account back to Jewish legend, or to explain it by the coarse hypothesis of misunderstanding, exaggeration, and the like, this one question arises: Might it not have been a purely inward transaction--in other words, does the narrative present an account of what was inwardly real?

It was not inward in the sense of being merely subjective; rather it was all real, a real assault by the real Satan, and it constituted a real temptation to Jesus. It was not merely outward in the sense of being only a present assault by Satan; it must have reached beyond the outward into the inward, and have had for its further object that of influencing the future work of Christ, as it stood out before his mind.

One might ask in what respect could Jesus Christ, the perfect sinless Man, the Son of God, have been tempted by the Devil? That he was so tempted is of the very essence of this narrative, confirmed throughout his after-life, and laid down as a fundamental principle in the teaching and faith of the church. On the other hand, temptation without the inward correspondence of existent sin is not only unthinkable, so far as man is concerned, but temptation without the possibility of sin seems unreal.

Jesus voluntarily took upon himself human nature with all its infirmities and weaknesses--but without the moral taint of the Fall, without sin. It was human nature, in itself capable of sinning, but not having sinned. If he was absolutely sinless, he must have been unfallen. The position of the first Adam was that of being capable of not sinning, not that of being incapable of sinning. The second Adam also had a nature capable of not sinning, but he also had a nature that was incapable of sinning. This explains the possibility of "temptation" or assault upon Him, just as Adam could be tempted before there was in him any inward consensus to it. The first Adam would have been perfected--or passed from the capability of not sinning to the incapability of sinning--by obedience. That "obedience"--or absolute submission to the Will of God--was the grand outstanding characteristic of Christ's work, because he was not only the unsinning, unfallen man, but he was also the Son of God. Because God was his Father, therefore he must be about His business, which was to do the Will of his Father.

Jesus had deliberately, and of his own accord and with a set purpose, gone to be baptized. That one grand outstanding fact of his early life, that he must be about his Father's business, had found its explanation when he knew that the Baptist's cry of "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" was from God. His Father's business, then, was the Kingdom of Heaven, and to it He consecrated himself, so as to fulfill all righteousness. It was his consecration, not only to the kingdom, but to the kingship, in the anointing and permanent possession of the Holy Spirit, and in his proclamation from heaven. That kingdom was his Father's business; its Kingship was the manner in which he was to be about it. The next step was not, like the first, voluntary, and of preconceived purpose. Jesus went to the Jordan voluntarily; he was driven by the Spirit into the desert. Not in the sense of being unwilling to go, nor of having had another purpose, such as an immediate return to Galilee, but in that of not being willing, of having no will or purpose in the matter, but being "led up" unconscious of its purpose, with irresistible force, by the Spirit. It was in that wilderness that he had to test what he had learned, and to learn what he had tested.

In his temptation he was to be placed on an absolute equality with us, except as regarded sin. Yet there must also have been some point of inward connection to make the outward assault a temptation. He is driven out into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted. It is not now a choice, but a contest, for Satan is the prince of this world. During the entire forty days of Jesus' stay in the desert his temptation continued, although it only attained its high point at the end when, after the long fast, he felt the weariness and weakness of his physical hunger. Since on no other occasion did Jesus exercise such ascetic practice; therefore we are left to infer internal, as well as external, necessity for it in the present instance. We can understand the internal as being a pre-occupation; and the external as the reduction to utmost outward weakness, by the depression of all vital powers. We can regard it as a psychological fact that, under such circumstances, of all

mental faculties the memory alone is active--to the point of being active in the extreme. During the preceding thirty-nine days the future of the work to which he had been consecrated must have been always before him. In this respect, then, he must have been tempted. It is entirely impossible for him to have hesitated for a moment as to the means by which he was to establish the Kingdom of God. He could not have felt tempted to adopt carnal means which would have been opposed to the nature of that kingdom, and to the will of God. The unchangeable convictions which he had already attained must have stood out before him: that his Father's business was the Kingdom of God; that He was furnished to do it not by outward weapons but by the abiding presence of the Spirit; and above all that outward submission to the Will of God was the way to it. The will of God was itself the Kingdom of God. It will be observed, that it was on these very points that the final attack of Satan was directed in the utmost weakness of Jesus. On the other hand, the Tempter could not have failed to assault him with considerations which He must have felt to be true.

Day by day, the sense of utter loneliness and forsakenness increasingly gathered around him, in his increasing faintness and weakness, the seemingly hopeless task he had undertaken must have grown upon him with almost overwhelming power. How could he hope, alone, and with such principles, to stand against Israel? He knew their views and feelings. The temptation to despair, presumption, or the cutting short of the contest in some decisive manner must have presented itself to his mind, or rather have been presented to it by the Tempter.

This was the essence of his last three temptations which resolved themselves into the one great question of absolute submission to the Will of God, which is the sum and substance of all obedience. If he submitted to it, it must be suffering, and only suffering--helpless, hopeless suffering to the bitter end, to the extinction of life in the agonies of the Cross; denounced, betrayed, rejected by His people; entirely alone, even God-forsaken.

When he was beaten about by temptation, his powers reduced to the lowest ebb of faintness, all the more vividly would memory hold out the facts so well known, so keenly realized at that moment, in the almost utter cessation of every other mental faculty--the scene that had so recently been enacted on the shores of the Jordan River. Here then is the basis of the temptation of Christ, in which the fast was not unnecessary, nor even the assaults of Satan. They were not clumsy suggestions nor were they unworthy of Jesus.

He is weary with the contest, faint with hunger, alone in the wilderness. His voice falls on no sympathetic ear, no voice reaches him except that of Satan. There is nothing bracing, or strengthening in this featureless, barren, stony wilderness. There is only the picture of desolateness, despair, and hopelessness. He must, He will absolutely submit to the Will of God. But could his present circumstances be the will of God? One word of power, and he could change the scene. The tempter suggests to Jesus' mind that by His will, as the Son of God, he could change the stones into bread. He can perform miracles and put an end to present want. But this would really have been to change the idea of an OT miracle into the heathen conception of magic, which was absolute power inherent in an individual without moral purpose. The moral purpose in all the temptations was of God--it was absolute submission to the Will of God. His Spirit had driven him into that wilderness. His circumstances were God-appointed, and when He appoints the situation, He will support us in it, even as in the failure of the bread He supported Israel with the

man. And Jesus absolutely submitted to that Will of God by continuing in his present circumstances. To have set himself free from what that implied would have been despair of God, and rebellion.

He cannot take up his Kingdom alone, in the exercise of mere power. Absolutely submitting to the Will of God, He must, and He can, absolutely trust him. The Spirit of God had driven him into the desert, and the spirit of the tempter now carried him to Jerusalem. Jesus stands on the lofty pinnacle of the tower, or of the temple-porch, presumably that on which every day a priest was stationed to watch for the pale morning light as it passed over the hills far off in the distance toward Hebron, to announce it was the signal for the offering of the morning sacrifice. If we might indulge our imagination, the moment chosen would be just as the Priest had left his station. The first desert-temptation had been in the gray of breaking light, when to the faint and weary eyes the stones of the wilderness seemed to take fantastic shapes, like the bread for which the faint body hungered. In the next temptation, Jesus stands on the watch-post which the white-robed priest has just left. In the priest's court below him the morning-sacrifice has been offered. The massive temple-gates are slowly opening, and the blasts of the priest's silver trumpets is summoning Israel to begin a new day by appearing before their Lord. Now then let Him descend Heaven-borne into the midst of priests and people. What shouts of acclamation would greet his appearance! What homage of worship would be his! Jesus is surveying the scene. By his side is the Tempter, watching the features that mark the working of the spirit within. And now he has whispered it. Jesus had overcome in the first temptation by simple absolute trust. If he should do as the tempter suggested to his mind, it would not be trust in God, rather it would be a matter of presumption. The goal might be reached, but it would not be the Divine goal, nor would it be accomplished in God's way. Scripture itself explained and guarded the Divine promise by a preceding command. Once more Jesus not only is not overcome, but he overcomes by complete submission to the Will of God.

Then at once the scene changes again. They have turned their back upon Jerusalem and the Temple. They have taken flight into God's wide world. There they stand on the top of some very high mountain. It is in the full blaze of sunlight that he now gazes upon a wondrous scene. Before him rise at the edge of the horizon, forms, figures, and scenes--there also come words, sounds, and harmonies. The world in all its glory, beauty, strength, and majesty is unveiled. Its work, its might, its greatness, its art, and its thought all emerge into clear view. And still the horizon seems to widen more and more as he gazes, and beyond it still more and still brighter appears. It is a world quite unlike that which the retiring Son of the retired Nazareth-home had ever seen, or could ever have imagined, that now opens its enlarging wonders. But passively sublime as it must have appeared to the Perfect Man, the God-Man--and to him far more than to us from His infinitely deeper appreciation of, and wider sympathy with the good, the true, and the beautiful--He had already overcome. It was not worship but homage which Satan claimed from Jesus, and that on the truly stated and apparently rational ground that, in its present state, all this world was delivered to him, and he exercised the power of giving it to whom he would. But in this very fact lay the answer to the suggestion. High above this moving scene of glory and beauty arched the deep blue of God's heaven, and brighter than the sun which poured its light over the sheen and dazzle beneath, stood out the fact:

“I must be about my Father’s business--Thy Kingdom come. Wasn’t all this the Devil’s to have and to give, because it was not the Father’s Kingdom to which Jesus had consecrated himself? What Satan sought was, “My Kingdom come,”--a Satanic Messianic time, a Satanic Messiah--the final realization of an empire of which his present possession was only temporary, having been caused by the alienation of man from God. To destroy all this: to destroy the works of the Devil, to abolish this kingdom, to set man free from Satan’s dominion, was the very object of Christ’s mission. On the ruins of the past shall the new arise, in proportions of grandeur and beauty never before seen, only gazed at afar by the prophet’s rapt sight. It is to become the Kingdom of God, and Christ’s consecration to it is to be the corner-stone of its new Temple. Those scenes are to be transformed into one of higher worship; those sounds to mingle and melt into a melody of praise. It is to be the bringing of worship, not the crowning of rebellion, which is the Kingdom. So Satan’s greatest becomes to Christ his coarsest temptation, which he casts from him in the words: “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.” They now receive their highest fulfillment and mark not only Satan’s defeat but also Christ’s triumph.

The sun no longer glows with melting heat. The mists have gathered on the edge of the horizon and enwrapped the scene which has faded from view. And in the cool and shade that followed the angels have come and ministered to his wants, both bodily and mentally. He as refused to assert power; he has not yielded to despair, and he would not fight and conquer lone in his own strength. He has received power, refreshment, and Heaven’s company unnumbered in their ministry of worship. He would not yield to the Jewish dream; He did not pass from despair to presumption. Then after the contest, and with no reward as its object, yet it is all his. He would not have Satan’s vassals as His legions, and all Heaven’s hosts are at his command. He whom God had anointed by his Spirit had conquered by the Spirit; He whom Heaven’s voice had proclaimed God’s beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased, had proved such, and done his good pleasure.

They had all been overcome, these three temptations against submission to the will of God, present, personal, and specifically Messianic. Yet all his life long there were echoes of them; of the first, in the suggestion of his brethren to show himself, of the second, in the popular attempt to make him king, and perhaps also in what constituted the final idea of Judas Iscariot; of the third, as being most plainly Satanic, is the question of Pilate: “Art thou then a king?”

The enemy departed from him--yet, for only a season. This first contest and victory of Jesus decided all the others to the last. In substance, it was still the same contest about absolute obedience and submission to the Will of God, which constitutes the Kingdom of God.

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d. TEMPTATION OF JESUS

Mark 1:12
Matthew 4:1-11
Luke 4:1-13

Mark 1:13

* * * * *

1. Read Mark 1:12

(1) Matthew 4:1-11

(2) Luke 4:1-13

Mark 1:12

12 At once the Spirit drove him out into the desert, Compared with Matthew's and Luke's accounts, this mention of the temptation of Christ is very brief in Mark. Some scholars believe that since Mark's account is so very short, Matthew and Luke have both expanded their narratives with material from their Q source, or that Mark abbreviated his own account. There is no evidence, however, that the Q source is an amplification of Mark, or that the Evangelist knew of the Matthew and Luke nuances of the temptations. Therefore one should resist the inclination to interpret this scene by the fuller accounts of Matthew and Luke. The version in Mark is complete in itself when seen against the background of the current Jewish belief that in the last days the evil spirit would be conquered in a great contest of strength. The temptation is thus a mythologized picture of Jesus' redeeming work: as Son of God and bearer of the Holy Spirit he overthrows Satan's empire. (JBC)

Verse 12:

the Spirit drove him out -- There is a nuance of compulsion or violence in the original Greek text, which is usually used of Jesus' expulsion of demons. (JBC)

into the desert -- Although Matthew and Luke clearly draw an analogy between Jesus' temptations and the 40 years' testing of Israel in the desert (Deuteronomy 8:2), this parallelism is all but absent from Mark. Rather, the mention of the desert reflects the belief that the wilderness was the habitat of evil spirits. Similarly, the 40 days simply denote a more or less prolonged period, without any allusion to Deuteronomy 8:2. (JBC)

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. The desert emphasizes the loneliness of the place. The phrase may even be a vestige of the Q narrative of the temptations. The verb drove is one of Mark's forceful expressions avoided by the later Synoptists; but the OT conception of the Spirit, which the narrative presupposes, was "dynamistic" and objective, not psychological. (IB)

Verses 12-13:

The same Spirit who descended on Jesus in his baptism now drives him into the desert for forty days. The result is radical confrontation and temptation by Satan who attempts to frustrate the work of God. The presence of wild beasts may indicate the horror and danger of the desert regarded as the abode of demons or may reflect the paradise motif of harmony among all creatures; cf. Isaiah 11:6-9. The presence of ministering angels to sustain Jesus recalls the angel who guided the Israelites in the desert in the first Exodus (Exodus 14:19; 23:20) and the angel who supplied nourishment to Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kings 19:5-7). The combined forces of good and evil were present to Jesus in the desert. His sustained obedience brings forth the new Israel of God there where Israel's rebellion had brought death and alienation. (NAB)

The entire earthly life of Jesus was bound up with the Holy Spirit from his birth to

his death and resurrection. (INT-1)

2. Read Matthew 4:1-11 entirely through one time.
(1) Mark 1:12-13 (2) Luke 4:1-13
3. Read Matthew 4:1
(1) No reference
4. Read Matthew 4:2
(1) Exodus 24:18 (2) Deuteronomy 8:2
5. Read Matthew 4:3
(1) No reference
6. Read Matthew 4:4
(1) Deuteronomy 8:3
7. Read Matthew 4:5
(1) No reference
8. Read Matthew 4:6
(1) Psalm 91:11-12
9. Read Matthew 4:7
(1) Deuteronomy 6:16
10. Read Matthew 4:8-9
(1) No reference
11. Read Matthew 4:10
(1) Deuteronomy 6:13 (2) Matthew 16:23
12. Read Matthew 4:11
(1) No reference

Matthew 4:1-11

- 1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.
- 2 He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry.
- 3 The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread."
- 4 He said in reply, "It is written: 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.'"
- 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city, and made him stand on the parapet of the temple,

- 6 and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you and 'with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"
- 7 Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'"
- 8 Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence,
- 9 and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me."
- 10 At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away, Satan! It is written: 'The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.'"
- 11 Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him.

Mark's brief notice of the 40 days' fast in the desert and temptation is expanded by Matthew (and Luke) into a triple temptation. A common source for Matthew and Luke is not obvious; if there is a common source, one of the two Evangelists has handled it freely. The biblical quotations (from the LXX) are identical in the two gospels. The order of the second and third temptations is inverted in Luke from Matthew; the order of Matthew seems to have a deliberately arranged climax. The movement of Jesus to the desert occurs under the guidance of the Spirit. (JBC)

It would seem appropriate that Jesus should have his vocation tested, and that his ministry should begin with a struggle between God's kingdom and Satan's, in which both God and his Son are vindicated. One can, however, suppose that Jesus set forth his inner experiences in some dramatic form such as this for the edification of his disciples. Certainly, the three temptations--to work miracles for the satisfaction of immediate need, to give a convincing sign, and to exercise political power--continually recurred in the course of his ministry. (IB)

Jesus, proclaimed Son of God at his baptism, is subjected to a triple temptation. Obedience to the Father is a characteristic of true sonship, and Jesus is tempted by the devil to rebel against God, overtly in the third case, more subtly in the first two. Each refusal of Jesus is expressed in language taken from the Book of Deuteronomy (Deut 8:3; 6:13, 16). The testings of Jesus resemble those of Israel during the wandering in the desert and later in Canaan, and the victory of Jesus, the true Israel and the true Son, contrasts with the failure of the ancient and disobedient "son," the old Israel. In the temptation account Matthew is almost identical with Luke; both seem to have drawn upon the same source. (NAB)

Verse 1:

[into the desert](#) -- This area is not specified; probably the desert of Judea (see 3:1) is intended. Jebel Qarantal, named after the 40 days, lies to the west of Jericho and is traditionally associated with the mount of temptation. (JBC)

Mark gives a more lively picture of the Spirit's activity. The devil, or slanderer, is the term usually found in the later NT books. The rabbis taught that Satan stirs up the evil impulse (the *yecer hara*) in mankind, seduces him into sin, denounces him before God, and then punishes him with death. (IB)

Matthew locates the place in the same general region where John was preaching.

It is not surprising that Jesus was tempted by the devil immediately after his baptism. Mark (1:12) puts it more strongly that the Spirit “drove” Christ into the wilderness. It was a strong impulsion by the Holy Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness to think through the full significance of the great step that he had now taken. That step opened the door for the devil and involved inevitable conflict with the slanderer. There are those today who do not believe that a personal devil exists, but they do not offer an adequate explanation of the existence and presence of sin in the world. Certainly Jesus did not discount or deny the reality of the devil's presence. (INT-1)

Verse 2:

Forty days and forty nights: the same time as that during which Moses remained on Sinai (Exodus 24:18). The time reference, however, seems primarily intended to recall the forty years during which Israel was tempted in the desert (Deut 8:2). (NAB)

forty days -- This phrase suggests the 40 years of Israel in the desert. The desert sojourn was a time of temptation and failure for Israel; but Jesus, the new Israel, is likewise tempted in the desert. The symbolic character of the narrative is evident; the temptations and Jesus' answers define the true character of his Messianic mission. The answer of Jesus to all three questions is taken from Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:16, 13). The use of this source shows that the Law itself reveals the true character of messiahship. (JBC)

The three temptations can be summed up as temptations to power. The first temptations is to use miraculous power to provide for ordinary material needs. (JBC)

Forty is a round number. Moses fasted “forty days and forty nights” when he was in the mountain with Yahweh (Exodus 34:28), and the Israelites were tested forty years in the wilderness. He was hungry might be translated as “he got hungry.” (IB)

Jesus was in communion with the Father, in complete abstention from food as in the case of Moses during forty days and forty nights (Exodus 34:28). (INT-1)

Verse 3:

The OT and Jewish literature apply the term Son of God to angels or divine beings (Genesis 6:2; Job 38:7), to the Israelite nation (Hosea 11:1), and occasionally to an anointed king (Psalm 2:7). In Semitic idiom it should mean “godlike” or “especially related to God.” When used by the OT to refer to an individual or to the nations, it usually calls attention to the moral relationship of love and filial obedience which should exist between a father and his son. In Judaism it never became a standard messianic title, and it is applied to the Messiah in only a few apocalyptic books (Enoch 105:2; II Esdras 7:28-29; 13:32, 37, 52) and occasionally in a late rabbinical source. Christians used it very early to refer to Jesus. The term is frequently found in the letters of Paul (for example, Romans 1:3-4) and the Gospel of Mark; and in John 1:1-18 it denotes the metaphysical relationship between God and his incarnate Logos. When Gentile converts first heard it used, they would naturally think of Jesus as a savior and healer though they would understand that there was and could only be one Son of God. In this passage “Son of God” calls attention to Jesus' unique relation to God and his superhuman powers, and Matthew connects this sonship with the Virgin Birth. (IB)

The devil is alluding to the words of the Father to Jesus at the baptism: "This is my Son the Beloved." He challenges this address by a condition of the first class which assumes the condition to be true and deftly calls on Jesus to exercise his power as Son of God to appease his hunger and thus prove to himself and all that he really is what the

Father called him. There were possibly round smooth stones on the desert floor which the devil pointed to, or even picked up and held. before suggesting they become loaves" (each stone a loaf). It was all so simple, obvious, easy. It would satisfy the hunger of Christ and was quite within his power. Bread is a mere detail in man's dependence upon God. (INT-1)

Verse 4:

The answer of Jesus (Deuteronomy 8:3) does not deny that ordinary needs should be met by ordinary means, but subordinates even basic physical necessities to the revealed word of God. Jesus does not fulfill his mission by providing for basic physical necessities, but by proclaiming the word that is life. (JBC)

Jesus refuses to use his power for his own benefit and accepts whatever God wills. (NAB)

God, being omnipotent, can sustain life without bread, for he once gave manna (Exodus 16). The contrast between stone and bread is found also in 7:9. (IB)

Verse 5:

The second temptation also deals with miraculous power; it is the use of this power to produce a "sign" (12:38-42), a spectacular and convincing display that would compel belief. This type of sign Jesus did not give. (JBC)

[the pinnacle of the temple](#) -- It has not been certainly identified. If the ancient structure of Herod's temple had relations to the topography similar to those of the modern Haram esh-Sherif (today's Temple Mount), the SE corner of the esplanade lay well above the level of the slope of the Kidron Valley; this may be the point meant. (JBC)

The [holy city](#) is Jerusalem. The [pinnacle of the temple](#) may be an eminence on the royal cloister on the south side of the temple enclosure, which consisted of four rows of Corinthian columns. Josephus says there was a steep precipice there (Antiquities, XV.11.5). (IB)

"The temple" here includes the whole temple area, not just the sanctuary, the Holy Place and Most Holy Place. It is not clear what place is meant by pinnacle. It may refer to Herod's royal portico which overhung the Kedron Valley and looked down some four hundred and fifty feet, a dizzy height (Josephus, Ant. XV. xi. 5). This was on the south of the temple court. (INT-1)

Verse 6:

Here the tempter supposes his proposal with a biblical quotation (Psalm 91:11-12). (JBC)

Verses 6-7:

Jesus is tempted to put God's promise of protection (Psalm 91:11-12) to the test; but this would really be unfaithful clamoring to be coined to faith by proof." It would contravene Deuteronomy 6:16, and this kind of test is forbidden by Ecclesiasticus 3:26 and rabbinical literature. What is the motive of the temptation? One suggestion is that Jesus would thereby convince the doubtful. A rabbinical tradition reads, "When the King Messiah reveals himself, then he comes and stands on the roof of the Holy Place." That Jesus refused to perform signs to prove his authority is well known (12:38-42; Luke 16:19-31). It has also been suggested that he was tempted to reassure himself, rather than others, that his vocation was genuine. Matthew's third temptation (verses 8-10) is a more obvious climax, but this second one might well be the most subtle and dangerous to one

who was spiritually sensitive. It is interesting that in Luke 4:9-11 it stands in third place. (IB)

The devil supports his proposal by an appeal to the scriptures, Psalm 91:11a, 12. Unlike Israel (Deut 6:16), Jesus refuses to "test" God by demanding from him an extraordinary show of power. (NAB)

The appeal to hurl himself down into the abyss below would intensify the nervous dread that most people feel at such a height. The devil urged presumptuous reliance on God and quotes Scripture to support his view (Psalms 91:11). So the devil quotes the Word of God, misinterprets it, omits a clause, and tries to trip the Son of God by the Word of God. It was a skilful thrust and would also be accepted by the populace as proof that Jesus was the Messiah if they should see him sailing down as if from heaven. This would be a sign from heaven in accord with popular Messianic expectation. The promise of the angels, the devil thought, would reassure Jesus. They would be a spiritual parachute for Christ. (INT-1)

Verse 7:

Jesus responds by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16, a warning against rashness. The appeal to the spectacular sign imposes demands upon God that God has not promised to fulfill; it is not the way in which he has chosen to reveal himself. (JBC)

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy again (6:16) and shows that the devil has wholly misapplied God's promise of protection. (INT-1)

Verse 8:

[a very high mountain](#) -- The mountain of the third temptation does not exist in nature. This is a temptation to secular messianism, the use of political power to accomplish the ends of the Messianic mission. (JBC)

The "taking up" may be in a vision or in the imagination. (IB)

This wonderful panorama had to be partially mental and imaginative, since the devil caused to pass in review "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them." But this fact does not prove that all phases of the temptations were subjective without any objective presence of the devil. Both could be true. Here again we have the vivid historical present. The devil now has Christ upon a very high mountain whether it was the traditional Quarantania, or not. Luke (Luke 4:5) says that the whole panorama was "in a moment of time" and clearly psychological and instantaneous. (INT-1)

Verse 9:

The story assumes, as Luke 4:6 says, that the devil actually possesses "all these things." This is the only temptation which may be called "messianic." If Jesus could obtain this secular power, he might be able to enforce his reforms; but he must acknowledge the devil's kingship to get the power. (IB)

The devil claims the rule of the world, not merely of Palestine or of the Roman Empire. "The kingdoms of the cosmos" (Luke 4:8) were under his sway. The Greek word used here for world brings out the orderly arrangement of the universe and represents the inhabited earth. Jesus does not deny the grip of the devil on the world of men, but the condition, was spurned by Jesus. As Matthew has it Jesus is plainly to "fall down and worship me", while Luke (4:7) puts it, "worship before me" which is a less offensive demand, but one that really involved worship of the devil. The ambition of Jesus is thus appealed to at the price of recognition of the devil's primacy in the world. It was

compromise that involved surrender of the Son of God to the world ruler of this darkness. The temptation was threefold: to gain a temporal, not a spiritual, dominion; to gain it at once; and to gain it by an act of homage to the ruler of this world, which would make the self-constituted Messiah the vice-regent of the devil and not of God. (INT-1)

"Get away" Christ says to Satan. This temptation is the limit of diabolical suggestion and argues for the logical order in Matthew. "Satan" means the adversary and Christ so terms the devil here. The third time Jesus quotes Deuteronomy, this time 6:13, and repels the infamous suggestion by Scripture quotation. The words "him alone thou shalt serve" need be recalled today. Jesus will warn men against trying to serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). The devil as the lord of the evil world constantly tries to win men to the service of the world and God. This is his chief camouflage for destroying a preacher's power for God. (INT-1)

Verse 10:

Jesus answer to this temptation exceeds his previous answers in severity and is prefaced by a dismissal. The quotation of Deuteronomy 6:3 places secular messianism on the level of the worship of false gods. (JBC)

The temptations of Jesus all touch upon his Messianic mission; even in a theologically symbolic narrative Jesus is not represented as liable to the common temptations of mankind. Nor in the mind of the Evangelist is he really subject to the temptation to abuse his Messianic powers. The temptation comes not to him but to the church, which carries on his mission. The elaboration of the temptation story by Matthew has an ecclesial purpose. The spiritual dangers that threaten the integrity of the mission of the Church have already been met by Jesus himself; he has shown how the Church must overcome them. (JBC)

Matthew adds to the source "Get away, Satan!" In 16:23 (= Mark 8:33), Peter is addressed as Satan because he tempts Jesus. (IB)

Verse 11:

The worship of Satan to which Jesus is tempted is probably intended to recall Israel's worship of false gods. His refusal is expressed in the words of Deut 6:13. (NAB)

The angels serve him, in accordance with the promise of Psalm 91:11-14. Matthew now begins again to copy Mark (cf. Mark 1:13). (IB)

13. Read Luke 4:1-13 entirely through one time.

(1) Matthew 4:1-11

(2) Mark 1:12-13

14. Read Luke 4:1

(1) No reference

15. Read Luke 4:2

(1) Hebrews 4:15

16. Read Luke 4:3

- (1) No reference
17. Read Luke 4:4
(1) Deuteronomy 8:3
18. Read Luke 4:5
(1) No reference
19. Read Luke 4:6
(1) Jeremiah 27:5 (2) Matthew 28:18
20. Read Luke 4:7
(1) No reference
21. Read Luke 4:8
(1) Deuteronomy 6:13
22. Read Luke 4:9
(1) No reference
23. Read Luke 4:10
(1) Psalm 91:11
24. Read Luke 4:11
(1) Psalm 91:12
25. Read Luke 4:12
(1) Deuteronomy 6:16 (2) I Corinthians 10:9
26. Read Luke 4:13
(1) Luke 22:3 (3) Hebrews 4:15
(2) John 13:2 & 27

Luke 4:1-13

- 1 Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert
- 2 for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry.
- 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."
- 4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

- 5 Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant.
- 6 The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish.
- 7 All this will be yours, if you worship me."
- 8 Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written: 'You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.'"
- 9 Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,
- 10 for it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,'
- 11 and: 'With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"
- 12 Jesus said to him in reply, "It also says, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'"
- 13 When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

In the baptismal scene as well as in the genealogical table, Jesus appears as the Son of God, commissioned for the messianic-eschatological work of bringing men to the fullness of divine sonship. The temptation scene, now makes it clear that Jesus is fully human too. As man, he undertakes his work in full obedience to the Father. Mark has the shortest account of the temptation; in this earliest narrative there is already a strong doctrinal orientation. Jesus relives the Exodus experience of Israel in the desert (Deuteronomy 8:2). By going out into the desert, a desolate land inhabited by demons and ferocious beasts (Leviticus 16:22; Tobit 8:3; Zechariah 5:11), Jesus subdues the hostile powers and becomes a new Adam living in perfect harmony with the beasts (Isaiah 11:6-9; Genesis 3:19-20). Although Luke parallels Matthew (4:1-11), there are distinct embellishments so that it is difficult to decide which one stands closer to the original form of Q. Matthew develops the two themes of Moses and the kingdom: Jesus, like Moses, is found atop "a very high mountain" (Matthew 4:8; cf. Deuteronomy 34:1-4); Matthew adds "forty nights" to the fast of forty days, thus more closely associating Jesus' fast with that of Moses (Deuteronomy 9:9, 18; Exodus 34:28); the third and climactic scene in Matthew concerns the kingdom, as Jesus rejects that of the devil ("all the kingdoms of the world", 4:8) to mount another mountain in Galilee, there to proclaim the true kingdom. All these differences in Matthew from Luke's version stress the theological viewpoint of Mark's Gospel. But Luke also has his own doctrinal viewpoint. (JBC)

In its present form the temptation narrative is a commentary on the entire course of Jesus' ministry. Time and again Jesus must have been tempted to authenticate his mission by a display of miraculous power (Mark 8:11-12) or to undertake the role of political Messiah (John 6:15), and the church knew that he had consistently refused to do so, recognizing in such proposals the promptings of Satan (Mark 8:33). No doubt the OT account of Israel's forty years of testing in the wilderness also helped to shape the narrative. All Jesus' answers are quotations from Deuteronomy 6 - 8 (cf. especially Deuteronomy 8:2-3). Nevertheless, although the details of the Q story may be the work of Christian reflection, Mark also records this initial period of testing. Perhaps Jesus

retired to think through the implications of his baptismal experience, and he may very conceivably have spoken later of the decisions made and the alternatives he rejected.

(IB)

Verse 1:

filled with the holy Spirit -- This phrase is typical of Luke (Acts 6:5). The double mention of the Spirit in this verse explains why Luke is called the Evangelist of the Spirit. (JBC)

was led by the Spirit into the desert -- The Spirit accompanied Jesus during 40 days in the desert, and only after this period of prayerful communion with the Father does Jesus engage in battle with the devil. The full force of the godhead confronts the world of diabolical power; it is the eschatological moment. (JBC)

Verse 1 is an editorial introduction. In the OT the Spirit is a sporadic and temporary influx of divine energy that enabled certain individuals to see visions, prophesy, or perform remarkable feats of strength. Paul insists that the Spirit is an abiding possession of the true believer, and responsible for the characteristic virtues of a Christ-filled life. Here Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit; that is, possessed by the Spirit in uncommon measure. Luke's topography is vague. Does he mean that Jesus returned to Galilee? (IB)

Verses 1b-2:

Led by the Spirit for forty days. Verse 2 combines intimations of both Mark and Q: the forty days in the wilderness were marked by recurrent temptation (Mark 1:13a) and continuous fast (Matthew 4:2; contrast Mark 1:13c). The specific temptations (unknown to Mark) were a sequel (cf. Matthew 4:2). Matthew has altered the order of the second and the third temptations, perhaps in the interests of a better climax, but other variations between the two accounts are minor. In the OT the devil (the Semitic "Satan" occurs in Mark) had played only a minor role. Even in the late book of Job he had not been more than one of the angels whose special duty it was to call God's attention to the shortcomings of the children of men. But in the intertestamental literature (probably under the influence of Persian dualism) he had taken on the character of an evil deity opposed to God, and was so regarded by the early church. For Paul he was "the god of this world" who had "blinded the minds of the unbelievers" (II Corinthians 4:4). No doubt Jesus also thought of Satan and "his kingdom" (11:18), as did his Jewish contemporaries and later Christians, as the great obstacle in the way of the rule of God. (IB)

Verse 3:

If you are the Son of God -- The temptation centers on the kind of a Messiah Jesus would be: Will he win the people by granting what they immediately desire, or will he thrust them into suffering by the divine ideals demanded of them? (JBC)

command this stone to become bread -- Luke uses the singular whereas Matthew uses the plural. Matthew refers to stones and many loaves of bread. Matthew sees all Israel being tempted in Jesus; Luke portrays a more personal temptation for Jesus alone. (JBC)

Verses 3-4:

In a state of hunger induced by his long fast Jesus is tempted to turn this stone (plural in Matthew) into bread. In a country of which not more than one fifth of the land

was arable under the best of conditions, and which was frequently plagued by extremes of drought and flood, bread was a precious commodity. In late Jewish literature visionaries loved to dwell on the marvelous fertility of nature that would mark the new age. Jesus was invited to assume a role that would have satisfied his own immediate needs and have fulfilled popular messianic hopes, but he repudiated the temptation. The quotation is from Deuteronomy 8:3--given more fully in Matthew. Man's most urgent needs are not physical and the meeting of such needs was not Jesus' mission. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). (IB)

Verse 4:

[One does not live by bread alone](#) -- Jesus responds with Deuteronomy 8:3 (cf. Exodus 16). Jesus' thoughts are expressed in what must have been the favorite OT book of the early apostolic church. (JBC)

Verse 5:

[took him up](#) -- It is usually stated that Luke reverses the sequence of the temptation scenes, for Matthew places the episode on the mountain last. Each Evangelist's arrangement fits so well into his own "theology" that it is difficult to decide whose order better corresponds to the original order in Q. (JBC)

[in a single instant](#) -- These words, found only in Luke, remove the idea of any physical translation of Jesus; it happened in a vision. (JBC)

[all the kingdoms of the world](#) -- Luke clearly refers to political domains. (JBC)

Verses 5-8:

In late Judaism as well as in the early church (John 12:31) the devil was the real power behind all the kingdoms of the world which would have been in the Hellenistic era the countries bordering on the Mediterranean, and in Jesus' day practically the Roman Empire. Luke apparently thinks of Jesus as lifted up into the air, for into a high mountain is an interpolation from Matthew found only in inferior manuscripts. Verse 5c is peculiar to Luke's version. The devil's temporal power had been delivered to him by God. For centuries the Jew had been ground under the heel of foreign conquerors--Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and then Roman. In much popular eschatology the Messiah was expected to reverse the situation. The oppressed would rise under his leadership, overthrow pagan rule, and establish Jewish hegemony over the world. Jesus is tempted to construe his mission in this light. But according to the logic of a pessimistic world view, such power could be assumed only as a grant from the devil, and its acceptance would be tantamount to devil worship. The invitation is rejected, once again with a Deuteronomic quotation, this time from Deuteronomy 6:13. (IB)

Verse 6: This is an addition by Luke, and not found in Matthew. We sense here the idea of the evangelist John that the world is under the power of the devil (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Luke 22:53; Acts 26:18). A battle of cosmic proportions is being fought to the bitter end. In rejecting a political messiahship, Jesus again quotes Deuteronomy (6:13; 10:20; cf. Exodus 23:24) (JBC)

Verse 9:

[to Jerusalem](#) -- Jerusalem constitutes the climax of Luke's temptation account, as it will of his entire theology. He presents Jesus' entire ministry as a journey leading to Jerusalem; but the true Jerusalem, perfectly fulfilling every prophetic hope, will be Jesus himself (Luke 9:51; 21:37f.; 24:50-53; Acts 1:12; Revelations 21:2). (JBC)

Verses 9-12:

The Greek word translated temple usually refers to the whole complex of buildings rather than to the central shrine, and pinnacle could mean “battlement,” or even the outer temple wall, as well as “summit.” Josephus pictures the giddy heights of the royal cloister on the south side of the temple hill, towering there above a deep ravine (Antiquities XV. 11. 5). The devil tempted Jesus to prove that he was the Messiah by thrusting himself into peril and compelling God to intervene for his safety by miracle. He quotes the LXX text of Psalm 91:11-12, interpreting it as a messianic prediction, and challenges Jesus to put its promises to the test. Shakespeare had this in mind when he made Antonio say: “The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose” (The Merchant of Venice, Act1, Scene 3). Again Jesus refuses to comply, enforcing his refusal from Deuteronomy 6:16. Scripture forbids any such challenge to God’s good faith. (IB)

Verse 10:

[He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you](#) -- Again with Deuteronomy 6:16 (cf. Psalm 91:11), Jesus rejects the proposal to be the Messiah of the gaudy and the marvelous, even though this is the kind of a Messiah many people want. Salvation is to be attained in the humble and at times sorrowful way of faith. (JBC)

Verse 13:

Luke writes his own conclusion, different from Matthew. (JBC)
[finished every temptation](#) -- The idea seems to be that Jesus has perfected himself through the experience of every temptation (cf. Hebrews 2:10; 5:9). Jesus as man completes his role as Messiah and so conquers for every man. The full effects of Jesus’ victory is now to be seen in his public ministry. (JBC)

[departed from him for a time](#) -- Luke anticipates the passion (22:3, 53). He edits all temptations out of his narrative of the public ministry, even omitting the incident of Matthew 16:23. Even though the devil returns at the end in the Passion narrative, Jesus, nonetheless, dies a man of peace and strength; the victory seems already achieved. His entire ministry will show that the way of the cross is a way to victory. (JBC)

Some scholars deny the historicity of the temptation scene. However, we must recognize the fact that the other Gospels portray trials and temptations in the later life of Jesus, and we must recognize the strong tradition, favoring the reality of the desert scene. Matthew and Luke (or Q) could have expanded an early but brief tradition (Mark) and added details drawn from later events because of a distinctly theological viewpoint. Luke’s first temptation reminds us of John 7:1-4. Other similarities occur in Matthew 12:38-42; 16:1-4; 27:42. Just as Matthew and Luke rearranged the sayings and activities of Jesus, disregarding chronological and geographical details, in order to form either the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 - 7) or the Journey Narrative (Luke 9:51ff.), so a similar process could be responsible for the way in which real temptations scattered through the life of Jesus are retold in a new setting in order to focus attention upon theological involvements. Perhaps this was done to counteract the claims of false Messiahs with their bizarre miracles; or it may have been to re-emphasize the humanity of Jesus against those who considered flesh to be evil. (JBC)

This is Luke’s editorial conclusion. [he departed from him for a time](#) -- Satan is introduced again as the instigator of Jesus’ betrayal (22:3). (IB)

* * * * *

27. Read Mark 1:13
(1) No reference

Mark 1:13

- 13 and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.

tempted by Satan -- The notion of temptation is connected with the view that a state of war existed in the world between good and evil powers, in which the believer was constantly exposed to the devil's attacks. Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark does not indicate the nature of Jesus' temptation, or even that it may have been occasioned by hunger. (JBC)

He was among wild beasts -- This may perhaps symbolize the beginning of the Messianic age as paradise regained (Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:25; Hosea 2:18). The wild beasts, however, may also symbolize the evil with which Jesus contends (cf. Psalm 22:13-22; Isaiah 13:21-22; Ezekiel 34:5, 8, 25). (JBC)

and the angels ministered to him -- Namely, in his struggle with Satan. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls portrays the angels as an army fighting on God's side against the evil spirits. Although Mark does not clearly indicate the outcome of Jesus' struggle, this is clearly stated in 3:27, and the implications of Satan's defeat are spelled out in Jesus' exorcisms. (JBC)

The temptation of the Son of God is told in fuller detail in Matthew and Luke, presumably from Q. Many scholars think that Mark has abridged that source, or its equivalent in oral tradition, in these two verses. In what the temptation by Satan consisted, Mark does not say--for details we must turn to the parallels in Matthew and Luke. The final statement, that the angels ministered to him implies the fasting and hunger of the Q narrative. Perhaps for Mark the details were insignificant: the reader is presented with a sharp contrast between Jesus' present loneliness--with the wild beasts--and the exalted hour of his baptism. Why should the beloved Son of God be subjected to such an experience? Mark, characteristically, offers no explanation, either psychological or theological. The parallel with Israel's forty years in the wilderness has often been noted. Jesus' victory over Satan is marked by the ministrations of angels (cf. Luke 22:43). (IB)

SESSION 16

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2. PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM IN GALILEE

a. TO THE FIRST DISCIPLES

John 1:29, 15, 30-51

1. Read John 1:29

- (1) Exodus 12
- (2) Isaiah 53:7
- (3) John 17:14

- (4) Revelation 5 - 7
- (5) Revelation 17:14

John 1:29

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

The second day of the "new creation story" sees the positive side of the Baptist's testimony, corresponding to his disclaimers of the first day. (JBC)

the Lamb of God -- In view of its situation in John, it is possible that in this figure the Evangelist sees a reference to the Passover lamb. This was a usual interpretation of the Latin Fathers. More probably, however, he has in mind the Servant of the Lord of Isaiah 53:7-12, where the Savior is compared to a lamb and is said to bear the iniquity of many. (JBC)

who takes away the sin of the world -- This phrase would seem to favor the Servant figure rather than the Passover figure. The Passover lamb, though it protected the people of Israel from destruction, had no connection with sin. Notice also that in 12:38 John sums up Jesus' public life in the words of Isaiah 53:1, which introduce this Servant theme. The Greek Fathers tended to interpret the text in this way. However, the Evangelist may have in mind more than one OT figure, as he often does. What is more difficult is to determine the meaning the expression would have had for the Baptist, since it is most unlikely that he had an understanding of the Lord's mission comparable to that of the Evangelist. One scholar believes that the Baptist referred to the Servant of the Lord, but in the representation of Isaiah 42:1ff. rather than of 53:7ff; that is, as one who would usher in an age of righteousness for the people of God, thereby banishing the world's sin (cf. I John 3:5, 8); the Synoptist baptismal scene in Mark 1:9-11 contains an allusion to Isaiah 42:1. "Lamb of God" is John's rendering, but the Baptist would have used the Aram, which can mean either "servant of God" or "lamb of God." Following another train of thought, another scholar believes that "lamb of God" was an apocalyptic title for the Messiah; the militant-yet-slain lamb of Revelation 5:6ff. is, in turn, a combination of this figure with that of the lamb of sacrifice. (JBC)

On the day following the Baptism John made a threefold declaration: Jesus was the sin-bearing Lamb of God, the One who was to baptize with the Spirit (verse 33), and the Son of God (verse 34). (IB)

the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world -- must probably be interpreted in the light of several references in I John, where it is said that Jesus “arranged to take away sins” (3:5), that he “will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:9), that he “is the expiation for our sins, and ... for the sins of the whole world” (2:2), and that his blood cleanses us from all sin (1:7). This language is sacrificial; yet nowhere in the Pentateuch is a lamb spoken of as the bearer of the people’s sin. We have probably a complex of ideas. Here was the picture of the suffering Servant “as a sheep led to the slaughter, and a lamb dumb before his shearers, ... whose soul was made a guilt offering, ... and who bore the sin of many” (Isaiah 53:7, 10, 12). There was also the symbol of the paschal lamb (cf. 19:36; Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12) commemorating the deliverance of Israel from slavery. When the Gospel was written, such conceptions had long been fused in the language of Eucharistic devotion. The dominant idea was the removal of the infection of sin, so that men can enter into communion with the holy God. (IB)

2. Read John 1:15

(1) John 1:30

(2) John 3:27-30

John 1:15

15 John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'"

This verse interrupts the flow of the poetry when it is read with the rest of the prologue but it does develop the prologue when read in that position. The sense of the verbs used by the author is of a present proclamation, contrasted with the past tense of verses 6-8 in the prologue. Now that John has spoken explicitly of the incarnation of the Word, he presents the Baptist as the first of a series of witnesses who testify on behalf of the Christ-event. (JBC)

John testified to him and cried -- The first verb, “testified,” expresses the one function of the Baptist according to this Gospel, the second, “cried,” is regularly used of an inspired utterance--by our Lord (7:28; 12:44); by those speaking under the influence of the Spirit (Luke 4:41; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6); or of demons (Mark 5:7). It was often used in this way in classical Greek. The change of tense from present to perfect present suggests that while the witness is part of the continuous testimony of the church, his actual words, spoken in the past, have an enduring significance. (IB)

This was he of whom I said -- refers to the testimony given again in verses 27 and 30. (IB)

ranks ahead of me -- in its literal form it would be: “has come to be before me.” which gives the true meaning. The last clause, **because he existed before me**, must refer to the pre-existence of the Logos. This is strictly an anachronism on the lips of the Baptist, but it is typical of the manner in which the Evangelist expresses anticipation of something. (IB)

3. Read John 1:30-34 entirely through one time.

(1) No reference

4. Read John 1:30

(1) Matthew 3:11	(3) Luke 3:16
(2) Mark 1:7	(4) John 1:15

5. Read John 1:31-32

(1) No reference	
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6. Read John 1:33

(1) Song of Songs 5:2	(6) Matthew 3:26
(2) Isaiah 11:2	(7) Mark 1:8
(3) Isaiah 42:1	(8) Mark 1:10
(4) Hosea 11:11	(9) Luke 3:16
(5) Matthew 3:11	(10) Luke 3:21-22

7. Read John 1:34

(1) Isaiah 42:1	(3) Mark 1:11
(2) Mathew 3:17	(4) Luke 9:35

John 1:30-34

- 30 He is the one of whom I said, 'A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'
- 31 I did not know him, but the reason why I came baptizing with water was that he might be made known to Israel."
- 32 John testified further, saying, "I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from the sky and remain upon him.
- 33 I did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the holy Spirit.'
- 34 Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God."

Verse 30:

[he existed before me](#) -- The same tense is used here as it was in the prologue for the Eternal Word; there is hardly any doubt that the Evangelist intends here another affirmation of the pre-existence of Jesus, who was almost unobtrusively introduced in verse 29. Was the Baptist also aware of this great truth when he uttered these words? It may be doubted: This is what is known as the irony of the John, the Evangelist. If the Baptist did not consider himself the new Elijah, he may, for a time at least, have thought of Jesus in this capacity; the words "the man that is coming" used here by the Baptist, are echoed by Jesus in Matthew 11:15 virtually as a title for Elijah (cf. Malachi 3:1). If the Baptist thought of the Messiah as being Elijah returned, it is easy to see how he could speak of him as one having existed prior to himself. (JBC)

Verse 31:

The Baptist had not known that Jesus was the Messiah, even though the express purpose of his baptizing had been to prepare men for the Messiah's coming. (JBC)

Verse 32:

It was only when he baptized Jesus that the Baptist recognized him as the Messiah. John here presupposes the Synoptic story of Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:9-11, and parallels) without actually mentioning the baptism itself; in John (as in Matthew 3:17) it is stressed that the theophany at the baptism was an objective event and not merely a private experience of Jesus. From Acts 19:1-4 we can be fairly certain that the Baptist did not have the Christian revelation of the Holy Spirit as a distinct person in the godhead. He would have understood the Spirit of God in the OT sense, as signifying God's vital power, and in this sense would have recognized that the Spirit "came to rest on him" (cf. Isaiah 11:2). John and the readers of his Gospel know of course that the Spirit of God is a distinct divine agent, a teaching that is much stressed in the second half of his Gospel. (JBC)

Verse 33:

This recognition by the Baptist was the result of a divine intimation. The OT prophets had foretold an outpouring of the Spirit in the Messianic age (Joel 2:28f.; Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 39:29; Zechariah 12:10). The NT recognizes the fulfillment of this prophecy in Pentecost and Christian baptism (Acts 2:16-18; 10:45; Romans 5:5; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 4:7; John 7:39; 20:22), events that did not occur until after the death and resurrection of Christ. (JBC)

baptize with the holy Spirit -- For John and the Christian reader of the Gospel, this means the outpouring of the Spirit as it was known to occur, which includes Christian baptism; but the Baptist would have thought in the more general terms of OT prophecy. Because the Baptist here contrasts his baptism with that of Jesus, and in view of the sacramental teaching that John brings out in the following passages, we have two probable reasons for his failure to state literally that Jesus was baptized by John. Such a statement would have interfered with the equation that John wants his readers to keep in mind: The baptism of John the Baptist was an OT expectation, whereas the Baptism of Jesus was a NT fulfillment in the Holy Spirit. (JBC)

Verse 34:

he is the Son of God -- Most manuscripts have this reading, although some versions have instead "this is God's chosen one." The former reading is probably a harmonization with the Synoptic account of the voice from heaven at the baptism of Jesus. "Chosen one" is an allusion to Isaiah 42:1 (cf. Luke 9:35), recognizing in Jesus the Servant of the Lord. (JBC)

the Son of God -- This title not only comprises but surpasses those which the Baptist claimed for himself. In the OT it was the title of the messianic king. To the Evangelist it connotes the perfect revelation of the divine nature (cf. verses 14 and 18). Some early authorities and versions reads "the Chosen One of God" (cf. Luke 23:35 with Matthew 27:40, and Luke 9:35 with Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7). This is not a term of the Evangelist John, and some scholars accept it as the original reading, attributing it to the Evangelist's subtle suggestion that the Baptist could not see the full significance of the messiahship indicated by this title. (IB)

8. Read John 1:35-39
(1) No references

John 1:35-39

- 35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples,
36 and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God."
37 The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus.
38 Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?"
39 He said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon.

Only from John do we learn that Jesus' first disciples had originally been disciples of the Baptist. The Synoptics, which begin with the Galilean ministry, place the call of these first disciples in Galilee, without any indication that there had been a prior call. The Synoptic account itself, however, becomes more understandable in the light of this information from John. We gain a better appreciation of the relation between the Baptist and our Lord and also why the Gospels, though ultimately the work of Galileans, show pronounced Judean influences. (JBC)

From this narrative we learn that our Lord's first disciples were originally drawn from the Baptist's circle of followers. The Synoptic story (Mark 1:16-20; Matthew 4:18-22) tells of two pairs of brothers suddenly called from their fishing craft on the Sea of Galilee to follow Jesus. Their prompt obedience is explained by the earlier encounter further south, that is described in these verses. (IB)

Verses 35-36:

On the "third day" of the new creation, the Baptist repeats his witness to Jesus in the presence of two of his disciples [Andrew, and an unnamed disciple who might possibly have been John himself]. (JBC)

Verses 37-38:

These disciples eventually accept the Baptist's identification of Jesus as the Messiah (cf. verse 41); but before they accepted him as the Messiah, they followed him as disciples would a teacher. (JBC)

Rabbi -- The common title given a recognized teacher, whether or not he had been professional trained (cf. 7:15).

which translated means -- It is John's practice to translate Hebrew and Aram words. (JBC)

where are you staying? -- The question is a natural one (as are other details in this account; for example, the time of day in verse 39), and perhaps suggests that the unnamed of the two disciples was the Evangelist himself. However, because the verb, (staying) of this question is repeated in verse 39 and is the same as that used of the repose of the Spirit on Jesus (verses 32 and 33), perhaps the Evangelist implies a deeper significance (cf. 15:3). (JBC)

Verse 39:

about four in the afternoon -- In the Greek text, this reads “the tenth hour.” (cf. verse 41). (JBC)

* * * * *

9. Read John 1:40-42 entirely through one time
10. Read John 1:40
(1) No reference
11. Read John 1:41
(1) John 4:25
12. Read John 1:42
(1) Matthew 16:18 (2) Mark 3:16

John 1:40-42

- 40 Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus.
- 41 He first found his own brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed).
- 42 Then he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Kephas" (which is translated Peter).

Verse 40:

Andrew and Peter are mentioned together in the Synoptic tradition in Mark 1:16 and parallels. (JBC)

Verse 41:

Most manuscripts read: “First of all [he found his brother].” This may represent a case of dittography; the original may very well have been (“early next morning,” used in 18:28; 20:1) presupposed by some Latin and Syriac texts, although it is not found in any of our Greek manuscripts. At any rate, the sense of verse 39 probably is that Andrew and the other disciples spent the night with Jesus, so that the meeting with Peter would take place on the “fourth day.” (JBC)

Verse 42:

That the Aram name of Simon Peter was *Kepha*, “Rock,” we know, outside the Gospels, from its Greek form *Kephas* in the writings of Paul and Clement of Rome. “Peter” (*Petros*) is a Greek masculine translation. The giving of a new name signified the taking on of a new way of life (cf. Revelation 3:12). Mark 3:16 also states that Christ changed Simon’s name to Peter, but does not say when this occurred. Matthew 16:18 associates the change of name with the promise of primacy to Peter, but it does not indicate that the change was made at that time. Interestingly enough, however, the change of name in John occurs in a context of testimony to Jesus’ Messianic character, even though it is not Peter’s testimony. The Evangelists equivalent of the primacy text of Matthew occurs in 21:15-19. (JBC)

Andrew's introduction of his brother Simon to Jesus encourages the surmise that the unnamed disciple was John, the son of Zebedee, and that he also brought his brother James, for in the tradition of Mark these four are the first disciples to be enrolled for the training of the twelve. The fact that the sons of Zebedee are never mentioned in this Gospel until 21:2, and that there is no reference to their mother Salome, is noteworthy because of their prominence in the other Gospels, and may be accounted for by the writer's intention to suggest indirectly a close connection between the Gospel and the apostle John. This identification of the unnamed disciple does not depend upon the precarious reading of "first", though that may imply that the other disciple also brought his brother to Christ. Some early versions presuppose a reading of "in the morning." There are several indications of time sequence in this chapter. Verses 39-34 describe what happened on the day after the announcement at Bethany. Verses 35-42 carry on the story on the third day ("the tenth hour" by Jewish reckoning would be from sunrise at 6 AM -- the tenth hour, or "four in the afternoon", or 4 PM), while verses 43-51 would cover a fourth day. If the reading "in the morning" were accepted, verses 43-51 would point to a fifth day. (IB)

Three times in these verses the writer gives a Greek transliteration of an Aramaic word, followed by Greek translation (cf. 4:25; 5:2; 97; 1116; 19:13, 17; 20:16). The Aramaic name *Cephas* is used by Paul eight times -- in I Corinthians and Galatians--but nowhere in the NT apart from this passage. This surname *Petros*--"Man of Rock"--is given in Mark's list of the twelve (3:16). Its mention here, in response to the confession that Jesus is Messiah, may be an instance of John's method of anticipatory announcement. (IB)

* * * * *

13. Read John 1:43-51 entirely through one time
(1) No reference
14. Read John 1:43-44
(1) No reference
15. Read John 1:45
(1) John 21:2
16. Read John 1:46-47
(1) No reference
17. Read John 1:48
(1) Micah 4:4 (2) Zechariah 3:10
18. Read John 1:49
(1) Exodus 4:22 (10) Wisdom 2:18
(2) Deuteronomy 14:1 (11) Sirach 4:10
(3) II Samuel 7:14 (12) Daniel 3:25
(4) Job 1:6 (13) Hosea 11:1

- | | | | |
|-----|--------------|------|---------------|
| (5) | Job 2:1 | (14) | Matthew 14:33 |
| (6) | Job 38:7 | (15) | Matthew 16:16 |
| (7) | Psalms 2:7 | (16) | Mark 13:32 |
| (8) | Psalms 29:1 | (17) | John 12:13 |
| (9) | Psalms 89:27 | | |
19. Read John 1:50
(1) No reference
20. Read John 1:51
(1) Genesis 28:10-17 (2) Daniel 7:13
- John 1:43-51**
- 43 The next day he decided to go to Galilee, and he found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow me."
- 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the town of Andrew and Peter.
- 45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth."
- 46 But Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."
- 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him."
- 48 Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree."
- 49 Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."
- 50 Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this."
- 51 And he said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see the sky opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Verses 43-44:

On the "fifth day" Philip (cf. Mark 3:18; parallels) is brought out by Jesus and added to the group of disciples. The mention of Andrew and Peter indicates no doubt the means by which Jesus was introduced to Philip; we are probably to assume that he too was a disciple of the Baptist. (JBC)

Bethsaida -- In 12:21 this city is considered Galilean because of its proximity to Galilee, although technically it was in the territory of Gaulanitis. It is not clear why John calls Bethsaida the town of Andrew and Philip, because the Synoptic tradition (cf. Mark 1:29) clearly makes them residents of Capernaum. Possibly John is indicating Bethsaida as the place of their birth. (JBC)

Verse 45:

Nathanael is mentioned only by John; it has generally been assumed that he is the Bartholomew ("son of Tholmai") of the Synoptics. In the Synoptic tradition

Bartholomew (a name that does not occur in John) is frequently mentioned together with Philip, and in John 21 Nathanael appears to have been, as Bartholomew certainly was, one of the Twelve; however the identification is not certain. (JBC)

[Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets](#) -- [An easier reading might be “the Mosaic Law and the prophets”]. The OT as a whole; the “one” of whom Moses and the prophets wrote is, of course, the Messiah. In 21:2 Nathanael is said to have been of Cana of Galilee. It was possibly here that Philip found him, as the next scene takes place in Cana. (JBC) This is simply a comprehensive expression for all the Scriptures (cf. Matthew 5:17; Luke 16:16, 29; Romans 3:21). (IB)

[Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth](#) -- This phrase reflects the common belief about the origin of Jesus (cf. 6:42; 7:27, 28) and may be intended by the Evangelist to give point to the contrast in Nathanael’s exclamation (verse 49). (IB)

Verse 46:

[Can anything good come from Nazareth](#) -- Nazareth, the town with which Jesus is first associated in his public life, was an insignificant village never mentioned in the OT. No prophecy had connected the Messiah with Galilee (cf. 7:41, 52), and certainly not with Nazareth. (JBC)

Verse 47:

[a true Israelite](#) -- A contemporary popular etymology of the name Israel was “one who sees God”; in verse 51 Nathanael is promised a vision of heavenly things. In the same verse, reference is made to the heavenly vision of Jacob (Israel) in Genesis 28:10-

17. The original Israel is being contrasted here with Nathanael. Jacob’s guileful character was well known, but in Nathanael “there is no guile”--no duplicity. (JBC)

In some versions the reading is: “An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile”. Wrestling Jacob received the new name of Israel, but his earlier name, Supplanter,” recalls Isaac’s complaint: “Thy brother came with guile, and hath taken away thy blessing” (Genesis 27:35). In contrast with that, the psalmist blesses “the man...in whose spirit there is no guile” (Psalm 32:2). Nathanael’s transparent character proves him worthy of the name Israelite. (IB)

Verse 48:

[How do you know me](#) -- Nathanael, who is about to recognize who Jesus is, has himself been recognized for what he is by Jesus. (JBC)

[I saw you under the fig tree](#) -- Jesus alludes to some event in Nathanael’s life known only to him. (JBC) The most likely explanation of the allusion can be found in several rabbinical references to a seat under a fig tree as the right place for the study of the Torah. Nathanael is praised as a true searcher of the Scriptures, who, unlike those referred to in 5:39, 46-47, will recognize him to whom they testify. His response justifies the praise. (IB)

Verse 49:

Nathanael climaxes the titles used of Jesus in the course of this chapter: “God’s Son” (cf. 11:27; II Samuel 7:14; Psalms 2:7; 89:26f.) and “Israel’s King” (12:13; Zephaniah 3:15) are to be taken as messianic titles. The Synoptic representation of Jesus’ Messianic manifestation as one of gradual revelation is doubtless to be preferred from the

standpoint of historical development; John has telescoped the historical sequence in favor of his deeper theological purpose. (JBC)

Verse 50:

Nathanael's faith has been motivated by a miracle extrinsic to Christ's Person; although this is not reprehensible, far greater will be the faith that comes from an intimate knowledge of Jesus himself (cf. 14:11). What the "far greater things" are that Nathanael will see, appears from the following. (JBC)

Verse 51:

[Amen, amen, I say to you](#) -- This is a characteristic of Jesus' solemn pronouncements in this Gospel; the expression occurs only in John (25 times in all), but something similar is found on his lips in Matthew 5:37. (JBC)

[you will see the sky opened](#) -- The reference is to Jacob's vision in Genesis 28:10-17; Nathanael, however, and all genuine Israelites like him--will see angels mounting and descending not on a ladder, but on the Son of Man. As in Genesis, the reference to the angels is to signify the meeting and communication of God with man. In the public ministry of Christ, and specifically in the "signs" that accompany that life, this meeting of God with man will be made manifest. This is the "far greater thing" than merely to recognize the messianic character of Jesus. The disciples, like the Baptist, have witnessed to Jesus' messiahship; but the Baptist is of the OT, not of the new revelation (Matthew 11:11, 13; parallels); the disciples of Christ will be able to witness to the very glory of God itself revealed in Jesus (1:14; 2:11). (JBC)

[the Son of Man](#) -- In John as in the Synoptics, this is Jesus' favorite designation for himself--a title the Evangelists never apply to him. There would seem to be no doubt that the ultimate source, at least, from which Jesus drew this title was Daniel 7:13f. In Daniel the "one like a son of man" represents the people of Israel, but an Israel that is glorified, the everlasting Kingdom of God. In applying the figure to himself, Jesus designated himself as the very embodiment of salvation: A man who yet lives with the glory of God, a mediator in whom heaven and earth meet. This revelation has been adopted eagerly by John, who has spelled out all its implications in his theology of the redemption. (JBC)

This verse carries on the train of thought from verse 47. The route from Bethany beyond Jordan to Cana would take Jesus past Jabbok, Mahanaim, and Bethel (Genesis 28:10-17; 32:2, 22-31) where heavenly dreams and mystic visions came to Jacob-Israel. Nathanael, true to his name as an Israelite, is, like Jacob at Bethel, to see "angels of God ascending and descending" on that celestial ladder. This interpretation of the ancient story was helped by the false etymology which derived the name Israel from three Hebrew words which mean in English "a man seeing God," an interpretative derivation found in Philo's allegorizing treatment of the story of Jacob. This prediction is not for Nathanael alone, to whom the promise "You shall see greater things than these" was given. In the original text, the singular (you) in verse 50 is changed to the plural (you) in verse 51. All who watch the incarnate Lord with the discernment of faith will discover the divine glory. "The opened heaven" belongs to the imagery of visions (cf. Ezekiel 1:1; Matthew 3:16; Acts 10:11; Revelation 19:11), but the term "Son of man" in this context suggests its eschatological reference in such Synoptic passages as Mark 14:62; Matthew 26:64 (recalling Daniel 7:13, and reflected in Acts 7:56); and Matthew 16:27-28. The

connection with some such saying of Jesus is the more obvious when the right exegesis is found for the preposition in the phrase "upon the Son of man." It has been shown that the picture represented by this translation is not one that the Semitic mind would entertain. It has been argued that the Aramaic meaning of the Hebrew preposition "upon" is regularly used with the meaning of the Hebrew preposition "unto" or "toward". The picture we have then is of the heavens opened and angels from above and beneath converging on the Son of Man, the central figure. The eschatology of John, however, combines allusions to a future conclusion with an emphasis upon the present revelation of the glory. The title "Son of man"--used 13 times in John, 11 of these on the lips of Jesus--represents in this Gospel the unveiling of divine utterances in human form, and so brings to believers a fellowship of the seen and the unseen. At the same time it stands for the authority to bring into the present the judgment pronounced upon those who accept or reject him whom God has sent into the world. (IB)

Summary from LToJC:

The forty days which had passed since Jesus had first come to him, must have been to the Baptist, a time of soul-quickening, of unfolding understanding, and of ripened decision. We see it in his more emphasized testimony to the Christ; in his fuller comprehension of mission; but especially in the yet more entire self-abnegation, which led him to take up an even less lowlier position, with the realization that his mission of heralding was coming to an end, and that what remained was to point those nearest to him, to another who had come. On first meeting Jesus by the banks of the Jordan, he had felt the incongruity of baptizing one of whom he had needed to be baptized. What he needed was not to be baptized, but rather to learn that it became the Christ to fulfill all righteousness. This was his first lesson. The next lesson was a completion to his understanding. It came when, after the Baptism, the heavens opened, the Spirit descended, and the Divine Voice of testimony pointed to, and explained the promised sign. It told him, that the work, which he had begun in the obedience of faith, had reached the reality of fulfillment. The first was a lesson about the Kingdom; the second was about the King. And then Jesus departed from him, and led by the Spirit went into the desert.

More than forty days had passed since that time. Yet during those forty days, it was the Isaiah picture of "the King in his beauty," the vision of "the land of far distances," which was a reality for him. It was a reality which Sadducee and Essene had no conviction; even the Pharisees had only the grossest misconception. All this must have ripened in the Baptist's mind throughout the forty days that had just passed. He was probably in comparative solitude except for the presence of some of his disciples. The prophet Isaiah's words would probably have been rather constant in his thoughts--especially as those words reflected back upon Jesus.

One morning following that final temptation John saw Jesus walking by, and he introduced him to two of his disciples in the words: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." We cannot doubt that the thought present to the mind of John was that of the description of the Servant of God as set forth in Isaiah 53. If the Baptist's mind had been filled with thoughts from Isaiah concerning the Kingdom, surely in the forty days that had elapsed since he had last seen Jesus, a new glory surrounded the well-

remembered prophecy. That passage from Isaiah had always been understood messianically--it formed the groundwork of Messianic thought to the NT writers, the Synagogues did not read it otherwise either. That is, until the necessities of controversy diverted its application--not from the times, but rather from the person of the Messiah. We can understand how, during those forty days, this greatest height of Isaiah's conception of the Messiah was the one outstanding fact before the Baptist's view. And what he believed, he spoke when again, and quite unexpectedly, Jesus came once again into view.

The Paschal lamb was, in a sense, the basis of all the sacrifices of the OT, not only from its saving import to Israel, but as that which really made them "the Church" so to speak, and the people of God. Therefore the institution of the Paschal Lamb was only enlarged and applied in the daily sacrifice of the Lamb, in which this twofold idea of redemption and fellowship was exhibited. There is one Jewish comment in regard to the Daily Sacrifice that has not been previously pointed out by the scholars, and it is more significant since it dates from the time of Jesus. This particular passage reads almost like a Christian interpretation of sacrifice. It explains how the morning and evening sacrifices were intended to atone, the one for the sins of the night, and the other for those of the day, so as to always leave Israel guiltless before God. It also expressly ascribes to them the efficacy of a "Paraclete", the actual word used. This Jewish commentary then stretches back its view of sacrifices to the Paschal lamb, and to the offering of Isaac by Abraham. But turning again to its teaching about the Lamb of the Daily Sacrifice we have the express statement that both the school of Shammai and that of Hillel insisted on the symbolic importance of this sacrifice in regard to the forgiveness of sin. According to the Hebrew word for "Lambs" especially as seen from Micah 9:19, the lamb "suppresses our iniquities" in sacrifice. Still more strong is the statement of the school of Hillel that the Hebrew word for the sacrificial lambs meant "to wash"--in other words, the sacrificial lambs "washed away the sins" of Israel. In view of such clear testimony from the time of Christ, a less positive assertion might be expected from those who declare that the sacrifices bore no reference to the forgiveness of sins.

When John pointed to the Figure of Jesus walking by, he spoke in words that meant more than just His gentleness, meakness, and humility--he spoke with the added phrase "who takes away the sin of the world." The "taking away" presupposes the taking upon Himself of the sin of the world. What was distinctive in the words of the Baptist is his view of sin as a totality, rather than sins, which implies the removal of that great barrier between God and man, and the triumph in that great contest indicated in Genesis 3:15, which Israel after the flesh failed to perceive.

The motives which brought Jesus back to this baptismal site must remain in the indefiniteness in which Scripture has left them. Yet on the very next day following John's pointing to Jesus and announcing him as the "Lamb of God," Jesus returned once again to the same area.

[We can picture the events that have taken place during this study session somewhat as follows: It was probably not long after the angels had ministered to Jesus after that final temptation, that John and two of his disciples saw Jesus walking by the baptismal site.

One of the two disciples we know to have been Andrew; the other unnamed one,

could have been no other than the Evangelist John himself--the beloved disciple. Several explanations have been provided to explain why the unnamed disciple is believed to have been John. The most emphatic is that in the Gospel of Mark, Andrew, Peter, John, and James are mentioned as the first four disciples to be enrolled in the training of the twelve. Furthermore, the other three Gospels all mention John by name, whereas the Gospel of John never mentions him by name.

They had heard already what their teacher had said about Jesus on the previous day in verse 29. But at that time, He had seemed to them nothing more than just a passing Figure. To hear more about him, these two had gathered around their teacher, and spent the day, and possibly well into the night, listening and learning, from what the Baptist told them. Now Jesus appears once more on the following day. No one was with the Baptist other than these two disciples. There was no leave-taking on the part of the two disciples--it was perhaps not their intention at the time to leave John permanently. Rather, it was an irresistible impulse, a heavenly instinct, that made them follow Jesus. It needed no direction from John, and no call from Jesus. When Jesus asked them what they were looking for, they responded with a question of their own as to where he was staying. Jesus invitation to them was to "come and see".

What actually took place between them we do not know. Although it is not mentioned, it is quite possible that these two disciples of John spent the night with Jesus, listening to him with spell-binding attention. Then early the next morning, Andrew left to tell his brother Simon Peter all that he had learned. From the use of the word "first" in the text, we can infer that both Andrew and John (?) left for the purpose of Andrew "first" telling Peter, and John telling James, of the events that had just taken place in their lives. Andrew told Peter that he and John ("we") had found the Messiah. Andrew brought Peter back to Jesus, and Jesus changed his name from Simon to Peter at that time. This then would have been the outcome of that day--Jesus was the Messiah, He had been found, and Andrew's and John's brothers had been told about Him.

Of course, it must not be supposed that this represents all that passed between Jesus and Peter, nor between the other disciples and Jesus. The Scriptures do not contain all the words that have been said between all the parties concerned. Most assuredly there would have been quite a large amount of conversation between them because of the dramatic impact of what was now occurring in their lives. Much more simply had to have taken place. We do know of its results. What passed on that holy evening between the new-found Messiah and his first four disciples must have been one of teaching and satisfaction on their parts. For the time being they were only disciples, not yet apostles which meant the renunciation of home and family. They were to remain as disciples for quite some time gaining in their knowledge and faith for future needs. For the moment all they could bear was a personal attachment to Jesus.

The next day Jesus made his decision to go to Galilee, and along the way he found Philip. It was probably a distance of about twenty miles from Bethabara (the baptismal site) to Cana (the marriage site to be discussed at our next session). Since the next scene is set in Cana, the route Jesus took to get to Cana would most probably have carried him through the vicinity of Bethel. It was at Bethel that Jacob had had his vision of angels ascending and descending the ladder to heaven.

Since Philip and Nathanael are both new to this narrative, the best explanation of

what possibly took place is as follows. The notice that Philip was from the same town as Andrew and Peter, implies that they must have told Philip about Jesus prior to Philip meeting Jesus in person for the first time. In turn, Philip might have told Nathanael about Jesus. Since Jesus would have had to walk in the direction of Bethel, it is highly possible that after Philip had told Nathanael his important thoughts, Nathanael had sat down under the “fig-tree” to meditate upon the Scriptures concerning Jacob’s vision. Or possibly, Philip found Nathanael, and engaged him in conversation just prior to Jesus and the others coming upon them.

The call from Jesus to Philip met immediate responsive obedience. There is also something special about Nathanael’s conquest by Christ which is implied, rather than expressed, and of which the Lord’s words give significant hints--"Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him." Jesus’ words seem to point to what had passed through Nathanael’s mind just before Philip found him--he was possibly looking back onto the events that had changed the name of Jacob into Israel. The evident reference to the full realization of Jacob’s vision in Bethel, may be an indication that this same vision had engaged his thoughts. As the Synagogue understood that narrative, its application to the then state of Israel and the Messianic hope would most readily suggest itself. The Synagogues thought, in connection with it, of the rising power of the Gentiles, but concluded with the precious comfort of the assurance found in Jeremiah 30:11, of Israel’s final restoration. Nathanael had probably rested for prayer and meditation after hearing what Philip had had to say about Jesus, and he was possibly studying in the shadow of the wide-spreading fig tree that is so common in Palestine. This is what the Rabbis often did. The approaching Passover season, perhaps mingling with thoughts of the Baptist’s announcements by the banks of the Jordan, would naturally suggest the great deliverance of Israel in “the age to come.”

Of course, the thoughts just outlined are nothing but suppositions. But it might well be that Philip had come upon Nathanael while he was engaged in such thoughts. Possibly the outcome, which would be quite in accordance with Jewish belief of the time, may have been that all that was needed to bring that happy “age to come” was that Jacob should become Israel in truth. There was one slight obstacle to Nathanael’s thinking about Philip’s proposal of Jesus as the Messiah. The man of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, would appear to be a terrible anti-climax. It was so different from anything that he had associated either with the great hope of Israel, or with the Nazareth of his own neighborhood. When Philip responded to Nathanael’s question with “Come and see”, there must have been such a moving power given to his unspoken thoughts that Nathanael went with him. Then as he neared Jesus, he heard Him speak to the disciples words concerning him, which recalled exactly what had just passed in his soul. But could it really be so, that Jesus knew it all?

Such was the small beginnings of the great Catholic Church. They were the tiny springs that swelled into the mighty river.

SESSION 17

Overview from LToJC:

Jesus' discourse to Nathanael might be considered his first sermon. His first testimony about himself had been to call himself the Son of man. His humiliation as the Son of man is the exaltation of humanity, the realization of its ideal destiny as created in the likeness of God.

At the marriage at Cana, we can see Jesus freely mingling with humanity, sharing its joys and engagements, entering into family life, sanctioning and hallowing all by his presence and blessing. We also see him as he transforms the water of legal purification into the wine of the new dispensation.

To the Jews marriage conveyed much higher thoughts than merely those of festivity and merriment. The pious fasted before it, confessing their sins. It was regarded almost as a sacrament. Entrance into the married state was even thought to carry the forgiveness of sins. The bridal pair on the marriage day symbolized to the Jews the union of God with Israel. All that was connected with marriage was planned with care, so as to bear the impression of sanctity.

On the evening of the actual marriage, the bride was led from her paternal home to that of her husband. First came the merry sounds of music; then those who distributed among the people wine and oil, and nuts for the children; next came the bride, covered with a bridal veil, who was led by "the friends of the bridegroom", and the "children of the bridegroom". All around everything was in festive array: some carried torches, or lamps on poles; those nearest had myrtle branches and chaplets of flowers. Everyone rose to salute the procession, or join it; and it was deemed almost a religious duty to break into praise of the beauty, the modesty, or the virtues of the bride. Arrived at her new home, she was led to her husband. Some such formula as "Take her according to the Law of Moses and of Israel" would be spoken, and the bride and bridegroom were then crowned with garlands. A formal legal instrument was then signed, which set forth that the bridegroom undertook to work for her, to honor her, and care of her, as is the manner of men in Israel. The bridegroom also promised to his wife a dowry.

Then after the prescribed washing of hands and benediction, the marriage supper began--the cup being filled, and the solemn prayer of bridal benediction spoken over it. The feast sometimes lasted more than one day while each one there sought to contribute to the general enjoyment until at last the "friends of the bridegroom" led the bridal pair to the bridal chamber and bed.

We are not able to fix with certainty the site of the little town of Cana. If we adopt *Kefr Kenna*, a modern peasant village a few miles north-east of Nazareth as a probable identification, we find it resting on the slope of a hill, its houses rising terrace upon terrace, looking north and west over a large plain, and south upon a valley, beyond which the hills rise that separate it from Mount Tabor and the plain of Jezreel.

On Jesus' arrival in this small town, he would hear of this marriage, of the presence of His mother in what seems to have been the house of a friend, or possibly a relative, and that he and his disciples had been invited to the feast. We might notice that Joseph is not mentioned after the visit to the Temple at the age of Twelve which suggests that he has died during the intervening time.

Entering the spacious and lofty dining room, it would be brilliantly lit with lamps and candlesticks while the guests would be disposed on couches centered around tables, or sitting on chairs. The feast would be in process--not the common meal of the day which was eaten around evening time, but rather this would be a festive evening meal. Now we can see Mary as she is whispering to Jesus that "the wine had failed." No one should imagine that there was anything derogatory, or even harsh, in the way he responded to her request with the word "woman" rather than mother. Mary did not, and yet in some ways she did, understand Jesus when she turned to the servants with the request that they follow his directives. What happened thereafter is well-known -- in the zeal of the servants to fulfill the request, they filled the water-pots to the brim which was an accidental circumstance. Yet this very accident shows that there could be neither delusion nor collusion when, probably while drawing the water, it became the best wine of the feast.

b. AT A MARRIAGE FEAST IN CANA ca. 27/28 A.D.
John 2:1-12

1. Read John 2:1-12 entirely through one time.
(1) No reference
2. Read John 2:1
(1) Judges 14:12 (3) John 4:46
(2) Tobit 11:8

3. Read John 2:2-3
 - (1) No reference
4. Read John 2:4

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Judges 11:12 (2) I Kings 17:18 (3) II Kings 3:13 (4) II Chronicles 35:21 (5) Hosea 14:9 (6) Mark 1:24 (7) Mark 5:7 (8) Mark 7:30 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (9) Mark 8:20 (10) Mark 12:23 (11) Mark 13:1 (12) John 7:30 (13) John 8:20 (14) John 12:23 (15) John 13:1
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5. Read John 2:5
 - (1) Genesis 41:55
6. Read John 2:6

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Leviticus 11:33 (2) Amos 9:13-14 (3) Matthew 15:2 (4) Mathew 23:25-26 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (5) Mark 11:15-17 (6) Luke 11:38 (7) John 3:25
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7. Read John 2:7-10
 - (1) No references
8. Read John 2:11
 - (1) John 4:54

John 2:1-11

- 1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.
- 2 Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding.
- 3 When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."
- 4 (And) Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come."
- 5 His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you."
- 6 Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons.
- 7 Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim.
- 8 Then he told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it.
- 9 And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom
- 10 and said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have

- drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now."
- 11 Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.

Thus far the disciples have repeated the witness of the Baptist, which declared that Jesus was the Messiah. In this episode we find the fulfillment of the prophecy made to Nathaniel of something greater than the messiahship to which they will be witness. The story John has chosen to serve as the first "sign" is not found in the Synoptic tradition, although it may be called to mind in the parabolic teaching of Mark 2:22 & parallels. It is fairly easy to explain why such an account would not have found its way into the Synoptic outline even if the witness responsible for the Synoptic tradition (Peter) had been present, since it would have readily been passed over in favor of material that was better assimilated into the kerygma; on the other hand, it is precisely such an event that lends itself to John's "irony." (JBC)

Verse 1:

on the third day -- In following the chronology, we must take this to mean the third day following the call of Philip and Nathanael. One of the three days in between the calling and the feast would have been spent in travel from Bethabara (Bethany) to Cana. (JBC)

Cana in Galilee -- Cana is mentioned in the NT only by John, but otherwise by Josephus and other ancient writers. It is called "of Galilee" to distinguish it from another place of the same name in Phoenicia (Josephus 19:28). The village (*Kefr Kenna*) pointed out to the visitor to Palestine today as Cana has a rival contender (*Khirbet Qana*) a few miles away, now completely in ruins. Archaeologically, this later site probably has more to recommend it as the place named by John. (JBC)

the mother of Jesus -- Mary is mentioned elsewhere in John in 2:12; 6:42; 19:25-28, but never by name. (JBC)

Cana was reached on the third day after the call of Philip and Nathanael. Jesus and his disciples had been invited to a wedding feast. Among the guests was the mother of Jesus, who is mentioned (never by name) again in verse 12 and in 6:42 and 19:25. A marriage feast lasted seven days, with fresh guests arriving each day. Wine flowed freely at these festivals and the supply may have run short about the time of the arrival of Jesus and his friends toward the end of the week. (IB)

Verse 2:

his disciples -- In John only five disciples have been mentioned so far (Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael, and the unnamed one) but in 6:67 the disciples of Jesus are called "the Twelve"; it is not clear whether all the twelve are present on this occasion. (JBC)

Verse 3:

Mary's observation to the Lord is not precisely the request of a miracle, although evidently she is counting on the resourcefulness of her son. In this gesture as well as in her command to the servants in verse 5, she appears to have occupied some position of authority at the feast; possibly the wedding was that of a near relative. (JBC)

Verse 4:

woman -- This form of address is not disrespectful; it was commonly used in

speaking to women (cf. 4:21). In its use it resembles our somewhat more formal “madam.” On the other hand, it was completely unheard of for a son to address his mother in such a fashion. (JBC)

how does your concern affect me? -- The literal translation is “what to me and to you?” It is variously rendered in modern versions. The idiom is from the OT (Judges 11:12; II Samuel 16:10; I Kings 17:18; II Kings 3:13; II Chronicles 35:21), where it signifies, as it does in the NT (Mark 5:7), a disavowal of some kind. It is evidently not an outright refusal of Mary’s implied request, in view of what follows. Some take it as a denial of Mary’s need to ask, since they translate the following statement as a question: Has not my hour already come? This interpretation was already entertained by some of the Greek Fathers. However, there is no obvious reason to introduce a difference in meaning in a word as theologically significant in John as Jesus’ “hour.” The disavowal seems rather to involve the role in which Mary has been cast, indicated already in the unusual title “woman.” Just as in Luke 2:49 Jesus reminds his mother of his relation to the Father, which transcends all human relationships (so also Mark 3:31-35; par.), so here he reminds her of the only title under which she may command his intervention; further, the time when she may thus command has not yet arrived. (JBC)

My hour has not yet come -- The “hour” of Jesus is that of his glorification, the crucifixion, death, and resurrection by which salvation is achieved. (cf. 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). Just as it is in this glorification that Jesus achieves his destiny, so it is in virtue of it alone that Mary’s intercession can have efficacy. Nevertheless, that hour can be, and is, foreshadowed by the “signs” of Jesus. (JBC)

Jesus’ answer to his mother seems harsh, not because of the form of address--for that is used with utmost tenderness in 19:26--but because of the words “What have you to do with me?” This translation gives the usual meaning of the Greek, and the saying may deprecate fussy interference. But the words might also mean, “What have I and you to do with that?”, that is, “Never mind, don’t be worried.” This is what is supported by what follows, “My hour has not yet come.” In that case the evangelist seized on a phrase which simply meant, “I must wait for the right opportunity,” and read into it the secondary and deeper meaning which it has elsewhere--a solemn reference to his death (7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). To this evangelist the “signs” of Jesus were a display of his power or “glory,” and his complete glorification on earth was the consummation of his sacrifice on the cross. His mother’s confidence in him is shown in her instructions to the servant. (IB)

[Another possible meaning in Jesus’ calling his mother “woman”, and the mention of “My hour has not yet come” is that it be taken in the same context as the words he spoke to Mary and Joseph during the Temple visit at the age of twelve, when he asked them “Did you not know I must be about my Father’s business.” Since the baptism, and the temptations in the desert, Jesus was now fully aware of what his Father’s business consisted of, and what he must do to abide by that business.--MINE}

Verse 5:

Mary’s action indicates that she did not take Jesus’ words as an outright refusal. She addresses the servants in the words of Genesis 41:55 (see 19:23f.). (JBC)

Verse 6:

six stone water jars -- Stone was used because in Jewish belief it could not

contract ritual uncleanness. It is doubtful that John sees any special significance in the number six. (JBC)

Jewish ceremonial washings -- that is, Jewish purification. Jewish custom demanded ceremonial washings before and after eating. John alludes to this ritual in order to explain the presence of such a large quantity of water. Also, this circumstance also allows him to point up a pattern that will accompany Jesus' "signs." A type associated with Judaism is systematically replaced by an antitype that originates in Christ. (JBC)

The writer explains for his Gentile readers the ceremonial need for six stone jars of water (cf. Mark 7:3-4). According to Josephus (Antiquities. VIII. 2. 9) we can determine the equivalent of the contents of the jars. The water drawn from these jars was brought to the table. (IB)

Verse 7:

to the brim -- The reality of what Jesus is about to do is stressed: The jars contained nothing but water. John mirrors the reticence of the first chapter of Genesis in alluding to Christ's creative miracle: His word alone is sufficient to effect the change. (JBC)

Verse 8:

the headwaiter -- At Gentile banquets one of the guests usually assumed the position of "master of the banquet" as a mark of honor. The familiarity with which the "headwaiter" in this instance addresses the bridegroom may indicate that the Jews followed a similar custom. (JBC)

Verses 9-10:

Again the reality of the fact is underscored. Testimony is given to the excellence of the new wine (cf. Luke 5:39) by one who is ignorant of its origin and therefore subject to no suggestion. (JBC)

The steward of the feast may be either the head waiter or one of the guests chosen to preside throughout the series of festal suppers. If the former, then the wine was tasted before it was brought to the table; if the latter, the steward tasted the wine when it was offered to the guests. The steward's protest to the bridegroom is, apparently an allusion to the custom of some hosts to reserve inferior wine to a stage in the festival when the guests were less capable of judging the quality of the wine! But this would hardly apply to guests who arrived later in the week. (IB)

Verse 11:

the beginning of his signs -- that is, the first one of his signs. The word "sign" repeatedly occurs in the first half of John's Gospel. Pre-eminent among these are Jesus' miracles, of which John records only seven. They are called signs not merely because they are worked to encourage belief, although they are this, but because they signify Christ for what he is: They illustrate his true character (cf. 5:36). As will be seen, John has chosen his seven signs to illustrate Jesus' character with an increasing degree of clarity. (JBC)

so revealed his glory -- The miracle of water made into wine may in itself not appear to be an apt indication of Christ's glory; however, it must be taken as John takes it, as the first of a series, all of which are related to the life that is to be found in the Word of God. As a creative miracle, it properly stands at the head of the series. (JBC)

his disciples began to believe in him -- The disciples have now been confronted with something greater than what the Baptist had pointed out to them. With this new creative power now made manifest in Jesus, the disciples have passed beyond the stage of history represented by John the Baptist. (JBC)

This simple story closes with a threefold climax: (1) It was the first “sign” Jesus manifested. (2) It was a manifestation of his “glory”. (3) It awakened or confirmed his disciples’ “faith” in him. (IB)

Summary on John 2:1-11 from JBC:

As has been shown, it is clearly John’s intention to write history in the record of this sign. This does not prevent him, however, from exploiting the theological potentialities of the episode; in so doing, he shows that this aspect is more important to him than the mere recording of a miracle. In stressing that the water Jesus replaced with wine was that water which was demanded by Jewish purification customs, he allows us to see the first of many ways in which Christ has replaced the institutions of Judaism. The pattern that has been established will be repeated in other episodes. That this pattern should have begun at a wedding feast is in itself significant, in view of the OT figure of Israel as the spouse of Yahweh (Hosea 2:21f.; Jeremiah 2:2; Isaiah 54:5f.) This figure developed in Judaism, and even saw in a wedding feast the symbol for the Messianic age (cf. Matthew 9:15). In this context, it becomes fairly obvious that John would have expected his Christian readers to make a further association in reflecting on the significance of this event in the life of Jesus. The sacramental interest that John displays elsewhere (3:5; 6:51; I John 5:6) leaves little doubt that he wants us to think of the Eucharist. This is probably also his reason for bringing this episode into close relation with the Passover (verse 13), as he does the other major Eucharistic episode of the multiplication of the loaves (cf. 6:5), to recall that the Eucharistic sacrifice is the Christian Passover (cf. 12:1; I Corinthians 5:7). Viewed in this way, the “sign” of Cana appears as something far greater than simply one miracle out of many in the ministry of Christ. It is, rather, a sign in the fullest possible sense, one of the sacraments (= “signs”) by which the Christian recognizes through faith and in the life of the church the presence of the same Christ who was visibly present to the first disciples in the flesh (cf. 20:29; I John 1:1).

John has not superimposed the sacramental connotations on his narrative only to have them recognized or ignored at will. His sacramental teaching is part of the purpose or reason for writing his Gospel: that those Christians for whom it was written may be confirmed in their faith and that in the name of Jesus they may possess the very life of God (20:31). That the life of the Church, the life of the Spirit, is indeed the life of Christ and that the sacraments are the deeds of Christ perpetuated is the common teaching not only of John, Paul, and Luke, but of the entire NT.

Something similar must be said of the figure of “the mother of Jesus,” as she appears in John. Mary is represented not merely in her historical character, but also in the function that has been reserved to her in salvation history. If John has seen a new history of creation unfold in the preceding days, he has also reserved a special place in this history for her who has been addressed as “woman.” The woman of the first creation was called Life (LXX: *Zoe* = “Eve”), because she was the “mother of all the living” (Genesis 3:20). Mary is mother of the new life, not only of the Word become flesh, but also of all

those who live with his life (14:19f.). She is, in other words, a figure of the Church, the new Eve, as the Fathers called her. A similar representation of John is found in the woman of Revelation 12, who is simultaneously the mother of Christ and of the New Israel, where again the imagery of Genesis has served as the inspiration of the vision. In this acceptance, we can see the relevance with which she is again called “woman” in 19:26f., where the beloved disciple, who stands for all Christians, is committed to her as to his mother. We can see the relevance with which her implied claim on Christ at Cana is apparently disavowed: Her intercessory efficacy is effective only in the glorification of Christ. However, because the hour has not yet come is nevertheless anticipated, her petition is granted. In light of this role, the enigmatic reply of our Lord in verse 4 becomes consistent with the action of verses 5ff.

Summary from IB:

Such a narrative raises questions which cannot be shirked by a modern reader of the Gospels, but especially of the Fourth Gospel. In considering any of the miracle stories in this Gospel we must distinguish between three things: (1) The event as it actually happened. (2) The story as it reached the evangelist, and as he faithfully reported it. (3) The story as it reached the evangelist, and as he faithfully reported it. With regard to the event as it actually happened, and apart from those who naively accept the story as it stands, there are those by whom it is accepted and rationalized (for example, Jesus told the servants to pour this water into the half-empty vessels on the table, and by his radiant presence “made glad the hearts” of the guests, so that they believed the diluted wine was a fresh supply of the finest vintage). By other interpreters, the story is dismissed as in no sense historical. In that case it is usual to look for the origin of the story in legends about Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and inspiration. It was reported that at his annual festival in his temple at Elis empty kettles, sealed the night before, were found filled with wine, and that at Andros on the fifth of January wine gushed from a spring in his temple instead of water. These legends are too remote from the Hebraic atmosphere of the Gospel of John to be treated seriously.

With regard to the story as it reached the evangelist, and as he faithfully reported it, the artless form of the story and the little irrelevant touches make it likely that the evangelist has accepted the story as it reached him. [It might also be the case that John himself (the unnamed disciple) was personally at this feast and witnessed the events with his own eyes, making the story a personal testimony to Jesus’ first manifestation of his “glory.”--MINE]

With regard to the story as it reached the evangelist, and as he faithfully reported it, John may have seen in it a symbolical suggestion of the superiority of the new religion of the spirit (cf. 1:26, 33; Ephesians 5:18) to the old religion with its external and ceremonial rites. But the main interest of the evangelist in the story is its evidence of the glory of the Son of God, now first revealed to his newly won disciples.

9. Read John 2:12
 - (1) No reference

John 2:12:12

- 12 After this, he and his mother, (his) brothers, and his disciples went down to Capernaum and stayed there only a few days.

John takes little awareness of Jesus' activity in Galilee. This summary verse, however, agrees with the Synoptic tradition in making the Capernaum phase of the ministry a brief one (Mark 1:14ff.; 2:1ff; par.). The shortest reading in the manuscript, possibly the original, lists those who went down to Capernaum as Jesus, his mother, and the brethren. Here the "brethren" means Jesus' disciples, who remained with him in Capernaum only a few days. The addition of "and his disciples" is explained through the identification of "the brothers," with Jesus' relatives. (JBC)

Jesus, his family, and his disciples travel down from the hill country to the plain on the northwest side of the lake, stopping at Capernaum for a few days before starting on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The home of Mary seems at this time to have been at Capernaum. (IB)

Summary from LToJC:

Immediately after the marriage of Cana, Mary and the "brethren of Jesus" went with him, or possibly even followed him, to Capernaum, which thereafter became "his own city" during his stay by the Lake of Galilee. The willingness of Jesus to allow his family to join him is characteristic of the Christian Messiah, neither was he impatient with their ignorance of who he actually was as would be the case if he were a Jewish Messiah. He was always tenderly near them in all that concerned the humanness of his feelings, yet sublimely far from them in all that was connected with his work and mission.

The most probable site of ancient Capernaum is the modern exploration site of *Tell Hum (Kephars Nachum)*. We know it from NT history, and from the writings of Josephus. Its importance had already become such that it contained the station of a garrison, and of one of the principal custom-houses. The town lay quite a way up the north-western shore of the Lake of Galilee, only two miles from where the Jordan falls into the lake. As we wander over the fields of the ancient ruins, about half a mile in length by a quarter of a mile in breadth in all probability this would mark the site of ancient Capernaum. All of the houses are gone now, all is a confused mass of ruins except for the Synagogue in which he taught. From the ruins of the Synagogue its dimensions can still be measured.

This is Capernaum, the first and main home of Jesus when he entered on his active work. On this particular occasion, however, he continued there only for a few days. The Jewish Passover was at hand, and he had need to be in attendance at the feast in Jerusalem.

3. PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM IN JUDEA

a. TO THE JEWISH POPULACE -- Passover

John 2:13-25

10. Read John 2:13-25 entirely through one time.

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------|----------------------|
| | (1) Matthew 21:12-13 | (3) Luke 19:45-46 |
| | (2) Mark 11:15-17 | |
| 11. | Read John 2:13 | |
| | (1) No reference | |
| 12. | Read John 2:14 | |
| | (1) Exodus 30:11-16 | (2) Leviticus 5:7 |
| 13. | Read John 2:15 | |
| | (1) No reference | |
| 14. | Read John 2:16 | |
| | (1) Zechariah 14:21 | |
| 15. | Read John 2:17 | |
| | (1) Psalm 69:9 | |
| 16. | Read John 2:18 | |
| | (1) John 6:30 | |
| 17. | Read John 2:19 | |
| | (1) Matthew 24:2 | (5) Mark 14:58 |
| | (2) Matthew 26:61 | (6) Mark 15:29 |
| | (3) Matthew 27:40 | (7) Luke 21:6 |
| | (4) Mark 13:2 | (8) Acts 6:14 |
| 18. | Read John 2:20-21 | |
| 19. | Read John 2:22 | |
| | (1) Matthew 12:6 | (5) John 14:26 |
| | (2) Luke 24:6-8 | (6) John 20:9 |
| | (3) John 5:39 | (7) Revelation 21:22 |
| | (4) John 12:16 | |

John 2:13-22

- 13 Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
- 14 He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money-changers seated there.
- 15 He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables,
- 16 and to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace."
- 17 His disciples recalled the words of scripture, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

- 18 At this the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?"
- 19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."
- 20 The Jews said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?"
- 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body.
- 22 Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the scripture and the word Jesus had spoken.

Overview in LToJC:

The preparation for Passover had commenced a month prior to the feast itself, not to mention the needful domestic arrangements for the journey of pilgrims to Jerusalem. The whole land seemed in a state of preparation. A month before the feast, bridges and roads were put in repair and sepulchers were whitened to prevent accidental pollution to the pilgrims. Some would have selected this feast out of the three great annual feasts for the tithing of their flocks and herds which had to be done two weeks before the Passover, while others would select it as the time for going up to Jerusalem before the feast "to purify themselves"; that is, to undergo the prescribed purification in any case of Levitical defilement. What must have appealed to everyone in the land was the appearance of the money-changers who opened their stalls in every county-town only a month before the feast itself. These persons were no doubt accredited and duly authorized to perform such a service. All Jews and all proselytes had to pay the annual temple-tribute of half a shekel, according to the sacred standard. Furthermore, it had to be paid in exact half-shekels of the Sanctuary, or ordinary Galilean shekels.

About two weeks prior to the feast in Jerusalem, however, the country stalls of the money-changers had to be closed, and they then sat within the precincts of the Temple. The money-changers collected a statutory fixed charge on every half-shekel, and more if the coinage presented for exchange was equivalent in value to two half-shekels. There would then be placed two charges on the exchange--one for the exchange into a half-shekel, the other for the change given back to the person. Not only would many native Palestinians come without the statutory coinage, but also a vast number of foreign Jews as well who would present themselves on such occasions in the Temple. Many of the foreign Jews arriving in Jerusalem would take the opportunity of exchanging their foreign coins with the money-changers. This would add yet another collection fee to the money-changer's profit. An immense amount might be collected by these money-changers during the course of the Passover feast.

There were many things to be bought within the temple area that were needful for the feast (in the way of sacrifices and their adjuncts), or for purification, and it would be better to get the right money from the authorized changers, than to have disputes with the dealers. We can picture to ourselves the scene around the table of an Eastern money-changer--the weighing of the coins, deductions for loss of weight, arguing, disputing, and bargaining--this gives a realization of the terrible truthfulness of Jesus' charge that they had made his Father's house a market place and a place of traffic.

The business of the temple money-changers would not be exhausted from simply the exchanging of coinage from one kind into another. Through their hands would also pass the immense votive offerings of foreign Jews, or of proselytes, to the Temple--in fact, it was probably the duty of the money-changers to transact all business matters connected with the Sanctuary. It is difficult to realize the vast accumulation of wealth that was to be found in the Temple-treasury.

The noisy and incongruous business of an Eastern money-changer was not the only one carried on within the sacred Temple-enclosure. It was a great accommodation, that a person bringing a sacrifice might not only learn, but actually obtain, in the Temple from its officials what was required for the meat- and drink offering as well. The prices were fixed by tariff every month, and on payment of the stated amount the offerer received one of four counterfoils, which respectively indicated, and, on handing it to the proper official, procured the prescribed complement of his sacrifice. The Priests and Levites in charge of this made up their accounts every evening, and these transactions must have left a considerable margin of profit in the treasury. This would soon lead to another kind of traffic. Offerers might, of course, bring their sacrificial animals with them, and we know that on the Mount of Olives there were four shops, especially for the sale of pigeons and other things required for sacrificial purposes. But when an animal was brought, it had to be examined as to its Levitical fitness by persons who were regularly qualified and appointed. Disputes might arise here due to the ignorance of the purchaser, or the greed of the examiner. A fee would inevitably have been charged for these inspections of the sacrificial animals.

The Temple would be utterly profaned by such traffic, and it would lead to scenes of anything other than sacredness and worship. Undue advantage was also often taken against the poor people who came to offer their sacrifices. The entire trafficking from the money-changers, to the selling of doves, to the market for sheep and oxen was a terrible desecration. It was also liable to gross abuses. The priesthood must always have derived a considerable profit from it--of course, not the ordinary priests, who came up in their "orders" to minister in the Temple, but the permanent priestly officials, the resident leaders of the priesthood, and especially the high-priestly family.

We are stating here what is most probable, not what is certain, from readings in the ancient Jewish literature. Questions might arise in such circumstances: What became of the profits of the money-changers, and who were the real owners of the Temple-market?

The Jerusalem Talmud gives no less than five different answers to the question of what became of the profits of the money-changers. The most likely answer was that the money-changers themselves kept their profits, but they probably also had to pay out of their profit a considerable rental or percentage fee to the leading Temple officials. The profits from the sale of meat- and drink-offerings went to the Temple-treasury.

In accordance with received Jewish opinion of the times the marketing that took place within the temple confines was most unpopular. The infamous high-priestly family's avarice and corruption is given a most terrible picture in the writings of Josephus and contemporary Rabbis.

These Temple-bazaars, the property, and one of the principal sources of income, of the family of Annas, were the scene of the purification of the temple by Jesus; and it was in the private locale attached to these same bazaars where the Sanhedrin held their

meetings at that time when the final condemnation of Jesus may have been planned, if not actually pronounced. All this has deep significance. Perhaps we can now understand why the temple officials, to whom these bazaars belonged, only challenged the authority of Jesus in purging the Temple. The unpopularity of the whole traffic prevented their proceeding to actual violence against Jesus at that time. The people themselves offered no resistance to Jesus' actions, even the arguments presented to Jesus by the priest were not direct--only in the form of perplexed questioning.

This particular purging of the Temple which occurred at the beginning of Jesus' ministry was different from those other similar incidents at the close of his ministry as told in the Synoptic accounts. When closely comparing John's account with those of the Synoptics the differences are so obvious that every reader can mark them on their own. It seems logically necessary, and fitting, that if any such event had occurred, it should have taken place both at the beginning and at the close of his public ministry in the Temple.

Jesus was taking up the thread where he had dropped it on His first recorded visit to the Temple, when he had spoken his wonder, that those who knew him should have been ignorant that he must be about his Father's business. Now he was about that business in the most elementary manner. To put an end to this degradation of his Father's house which had become a "market-place" (a den of thieves) was a most suitable and almost necessary beginning of his messianic work.

Overview in JBC:

The story of the cleansing of the Temple occurs in the Synoptic tradition (Mark 11:15-18; par.) at the close rather than at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, during a Passover feast, the only one recorded in the Synoptics. Despite the incidental dissimilarities, the same event is apparently referred to; no point is necessarily to be made of either the Synoptic or the chronology by John. In both instances, the meaning of the event, rather than when it took place, is the point of emphasis.

Verse 13:

[the Passover of the Jews](#) -- John knows of a Christian Passover (cf. I Corinthians 5:7), of which the Jewish feast was but a type. The feasts of Judaism play a major role in John's Gospel as representing the institutions that prefigured Christ. It is difficult to accept as a whole, however, the thesis of one scholar who claims that the order and discourses of John have been determined according to the (partly conjectural) three cycles of synagogue lectionary readings for the great feasts. (JBC)

The first of the annual feasts which play an important part in the chronological setting of this Gospel is described as "the Passover of the Jews", another sign of the writer's care to explain Jewish custom to Gentile readers. Pilgrims went up to the religious metropolis. (IB)

Verse 14:

Various kinds of sacrificial animals were for sale at the Temple so that the pilgrims would not have the added expense of bringing them from afar. The only money accepted at the Temple was the Tyrian half-shekel. Roman coinage could not be used; hence the money-changers performed a necessary function. (JBC)

The scene described in this and the following verses varies in some important details from the Synoptic narrative (Mark 11:15-19; Matthew 21:12-13; Luke 19:45-46). The Temple here is the precinct, not the Temple proper. The Court of the Gentiles was a

large outer enclosure, surrounded by colonnades to which Gentiles as well as Jews had access. Here it was that oxen, sheep, and pigeons, after due examination to prove their freedom from blemish, were sold for the required sacrifices. Here also were the tables of those who changed the Roman coinage for the Tyrian shekels or half-shekels in which the annual head tax had to be paid into the temple treasury. The Greek words used for these money-changers refer to the small money and to the fee charged for this transaction. (IB)
Verse 15:

[a whip out of cords](#) -- Not mentioned in the Synoptic accounts. If the number of animals and tenders was large, as it probably was, the whip must have served as a symbol of authority rather than as a physical goad. On the other hand, Jesus may have enlisted the assistance of his disciples in this gesture. (JBC)

Verse 16:

In the Synoptic account Jesus' wrath appears to be directed against the dishonesty of the traffickers in the Temple; in John the emphasis is rather on the very institutions themselves which Jesus opposes. The sacrificial system of Judaism has made a "market-place" of the Temple. This more radical opposition is in keeping with the interpretation in verse 21. (JBC)

[my Father's house](#) -- The formula "my Father" by which Jesus testified to his special relationship to God is found not only in John (27 times), but also in Matthew (16 times) and Luke (4 times). (JBC)

Verse 17:

The disciples recalled the words of Psalm 69:10. This Psalm is used in the NT more frequently than any other, always in a messianic application, which is presumably how the disciples understood it at this time. Such an action of cleansing had been predicted of the messianic age by Zechariah 14:21. After the resurrection (verse 22), the disciples saw the profound meaning of Christ's words and deeds signified in verse 21. (JBC)

Verses 15-17:

According to John, Jesus made a "whip of cord," that is, of the thongs used by the cattle drovers--sticks and weapons were not allowed within the temple precincts. The cattle traders as well as the oxen and sheep were driven out, and the tables with their heaps of coins were overturned. In Mark 11:17 the meaning of this action is explained by the quotation from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11, and a prohibition is added about fetching and carrying through the court. In John the same purpose is clear, although instead of the scripture citations, Jesus forbids "my Father's house" to be turned into a bazaar. In both narratives the indignation of Jesus is aroused by the hindrance offered to the devout worshipper, but John misses the touches that give a deeper meaning to Mark's story. That story emphasizes the universal mission of Judaism, and hints that sanctuary was given to scoundrels within the temple. John lays stress on the irreverence of the traffic. The disciples recall words from Psalm 69:9, regarded as a messianic psalm and cited again at 15:25; 19:29; Acts 1:20; and Romans 15:3. The tense is changed from the past to the future, and the psalmist's metaphor of an inwardly consuming flame of energy becomes an anticipation of the doom that awaits the reforming Messiah whose attack upon vested interests will cost him his life. (IB)

Verse 18:

[the Jews](#) -- Here the Temple authorities, who would have represented the priesthood. (JBC)

[what sign](#) -- The demand for a sign was continually being made of Jesus (cf. Mark 8:11; par.), a demand that he continually refused to gratify. Signs are for the well-disposed, to evoke or to confirm faith. (JBC)

Verse 19:

Jesus did foretell the destruction of the Temple (cf. Mark 13:2); however, here he refers to his death and resurrection, the truly adequate sign to be given for all believers (cf. 3:21). This corresponds to the Synoptic saying recorded in Matthew 12:38ff.; par. (JBC)

Verses 18-19:

“The Jews” are the high priest’s party, the Sadducean controllers of the Temple revenues. They demand authorization for the action of Jesus; that is, who gave to Jesus the authority to do such a thing. So in the Synoptic narrative (cf. Mark 1:27-28: “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?”) Jesus is challenged by “the chief priests and the scribes and the elders,” to whom he replies by a counterquestion about the Baptist’s mission. In John the question takes the form, “What sign have you to show us for doing this?” Jesus’ answer is given in the form “Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” There is evidently a sound historical tradition behind this saying, for the Synoptists record that false evidence was given at his trial that Jesus had said, “I will destroy this Temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands” (Mark 14:58; cf. Acts 7:48-50; II Corinthians 5:1). The Synoptic writers do not report this saying in connection with the cleansing of the Temple, but it may well be given its right context in John. The imperative form is equivalent to a future, and the meaning is “You will destroy this Temple and I will rebuild it at once.” (IB)

The purpose of this saying raises many difficulties and has given rise to many interpretations. In keeping with the Evangelist’s style, the reply is deliberately ambiguous and was misunderstood by the hearers. The word “Temple” is used both for a religious shrine and for the “body,” as in I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19. The word for “destroy” is used both of the demolition of houses or temples and of the dissolution of the body; so also “raise” can be used of erecting a building, and in Christian use it constantly referred to the resurrection from the dead. In John’s story of this episode it is evident that the Jewish authorities took the saying to mean the destruction of the temple and Jesus’ claim to rebuild it immediately, while the disciples after the resurrection interpreted it as a prophecy of his death and resurrection. It is likely that Jesus did predict the destruction of the temple as the result of the forces at work in the religious and political state of Judaism at that time (cf. Mark 13:2). He also believed that a new and more spiritual kind of worship would replace the sacrificial system which was typified in the spectacle which had just led to his drastic symbol of reform (cf. 4:21-26). There is evidence that later in his ministry Jesus regarded his death as the means by which the old order would be condemned, and the new Israel would come into being through the new covenant sealed by his blood. The church was called in Paul’s time “the body of Christ.” All these ideas entered into the Evangelist’s mind as he retold the story of Christ’s challenge to the chief

priests as the leaders of the national religion. (IB)

Verse 20:

The Jews take Jesus' words literally--words that at his trial were distorted into an imputation of sorcery (Matthew 26:61; par.). (JBC)

[forty-six years](#) -- According to Josephus ([Antiquities](#). 15. 11. 1), the Temple of Herod was begun in his 18th year (20/19 B.C.). Hence John would have dated this episode ca. 27/28 A.D. The Temple was not completed in Jesus' lifetime, being finished only in 63/64 A.D., shortly before its destruction by the Romans. (JBC)

"Forty-six years ... three days". The opponents of Jesus fasten upon this paradox. "In three days" may conform to the early Christian reference to Easter day. Probably the original form of this saying meant "after a short interval." "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple" correctly renders the tense which does not imply the completion of the work; cf. Ezra 5:16 (LXX), where the same tense is used: "Since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not completed". Herod's temple was begun in 20-19 B.C. Forty-six years would bring the date to 27-28 A.D. As the temple was not finally completed until 64 A.D., this saying sounds like an early Christian tradition preserved by the Evangelist, and is a point in favor of the place given to this incident in the Fourth Gospel. (IB)

[One might add that the Evangelist himself might have been present during this incident which would add further to the understanding of it--that this might possibly be not the same incident that is mentioned by the Synoptics, but a separate incident entirely--MINE]

Verse 21:

The Gospels frequently testify that the full significance of his words and deeds was only understood in the light of his resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit. (cf. 7:39; 13:19; 14:29; Luke 24:8). (JBC)

[scripture](#) -- From Acts 2:31 and 13:35 we know that the primitive Church saw in Psalm 16:10 a subtle hint of the resurrection. (JBC)

Verses 21-22:

Verse 21 is a comment by the evangelist, one of many such comments. The disciples would interpret many acts and sayings of Jesus after the events in the light of his resurrection (cf. 12:16; also hints dropped by Jesus, as 13:19; 14:29). "The scripture," that is, a particular passage of the OT citations which were regarded as messianic, with their fulfillment in the life and work of Jesus. Such texts as Psalm 16:10; Hosea 6:2; and Leviticus 23:10-11, may have been applied to the Resurrection (cf. I Corinthians 15:4, 20); also Jonah 1:17 (cf. Matthew 12:40). (IB)

20. Read John 2:23
(1) John 4:45

21. Read John 2:24
(1) No Reference

22. Read John 2:25

- (1) I Kings 8:39
- (2) Psalm 33:15
- (3) Psalm 94:11

- (4) Sirach 42:18
- (5) Jeremiah 17:10
- (6) Jeremiah 20:12

John 2:23-25

- 23 While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing.
- 24 But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all,
- 25 and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well.

Summary from LToJC:

There were many of those present who probably knew Jesus. The zeal of his early disciples could not have given place to absolute silence. The many Galilean pilgrims in the Temple probably spread news about this event, and the report must soon have passed from one to the other in the Temple-courts, as he first entered their sacred enclosure. They would follow him, and watch what he did. He inaugurated his mission by fulfilling the prediction concerning him as a refiner and purifier (Malachi 3:1-3). Scarcely had he entered the temple-porch, and trod the Court of Gentiles, then he had driven from there those things that profanely defiled it. There was not a hand lifted, not a word spoken to arrest him, as he made the scourge of small cords and with it drove out of the Temple both the sheep and the oxen, not a word said, nor a hand raised, as he poured into their receptacles the money of the money-changers, and overthrew their tables. His presence awed them, his words awakened even their consciences; and they knew only too well just how true his denunciations were. Behind him was gathered the wondering multitude.

This brief notice refers to a period of activity during the Passover festival. The tense of the verb (“was doing”) points to a continuous ministry of signs which are not recorded in the Gospel (cf. 20:30-31), but are mentioned again (4:45) as the reason for Jesus’ welcome by the Galileans who had been present at the feast. Evidently some of the Judeans recognized these wonders as tokens of his messiahship, for that is probably the meaning of “many began to believe in his name”. Yet their faith was not deep, but a transient excitement, and the evangelist’s reason for the reserve shown by Jesus points darkly to his last week in the city and the cry of the Jerusalem mob, “Crucify him!” It is part of the dramatic method of John to anticipate both the messianic discovery and the tragedy of Calvary. The influence of signs in the creation of faith is recognized (7:31; 10:42; 14:11), but is regarded rather as a rudimentary stage of belief, while a beatitude is pronounced upon those who have not seen and yet have believed (20:29; cf. 4:48). Our Lord’s insight into the thoughts and character of mankind (1:47-48; 5:42; 6:61, 64; 13:11; 16:30) is taken in this Gospel as an attribute of the incarnate Logos. (IB)

Verse 23:

signs -- Although John has thus far mentioned only one miracle at Cana, he presupposes the numerous miracles of the Synoptic tradition (cf. 3:2; 4:45). Matthew 21:14f. speaks of miracles that occurred at the time of the cleansing of the Temple.

Verses 24-25:

A faith based merely on miracles without a proper recognition of the nature of

him who performed them would prove to be unstable and inconstant. The same idea occurs in 6:2. Jesus, who is truly man but endowed with the wisdom of God, labors under no illusions, concerning human frailty.

SESSION 18

Jesus was the master Evangelist, ministering to large audiences and to individuals personally. In the former he demonstrated his concern for all people; in the latter he showed his interest and love for each person. There are about nineteen private interviews by Jesus which are cited in the Gospels. Two of his longest recorded interviews are those which take place in his early Judean ministry. One was a man, Nicodemus, the other a woman. The man is identified by name, the woman is identified only by city. The man was a religious ruler of the Jewish Sanhedrin; the woman was an immoral wife. The man sought Jesus in secret; Jesus initiated the interview with the woman in broad daylight.

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, was a member of the Sanhedrin (John 7:5). This was the Jewish senate and highest court in both ecclesiastical and civil disputes. It consisted of 71 members, including the high priest who presided over it, and it drew its membership from the Jewish aristocracy: the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Most of its members were either Pharisees or Sadducees, and the Pharisees were in the majority. The Sanhedrin had great power, its own police officers, and its decisions were regarded as binding throughout the Jewish world, although the Roman authority still superceded it.

Overview from LToJC:

As we saw in our last session, at the first Passover feast Jesus attended as an adult, he performed many “signs” in sight of the people. Jesus had cleansed the temple, and the officials there had demanded some type of authority from which Jesus had acted as he did. It might be wise to notice at this point that the cleansing of the Temple most likely preceded the actual Festive Paschal week. To those who were in Jerusalem it was a week such as had never been seen before, a week when “they saw the signs which He did,” and when, stirred by a strange impulse, “they believed in his name” as the Messiah. But it was only a milk-faith (as Luther would call it) which fed on, and required for its sustenance, “signs.” And like a vision it passed with the thing seen. It was not a faith to which the sign was only the fingerpost, but a faith of which the sign, not the thing signified, was the substance; a faith which dazzled the mental sight, but did not reach down into the heart. And Jesus, who with heart-searching glance saw what was in man, and therefore did not commit himself to them. They were not like his first Galilean disciples, true of heart and in heart. These persons conceptions of him were very different from those of his disciples. Still yet, in wondrous love, he condescended and spoke to them in the only language they could understand, in that of “signs.” Nor was it all in vain. Unlike the Jews of that ancient age, and in our modern times, we would not expect to be convinced of the truth of religion, nor even converted to it, by any outward miracles. In fact, we would not expect them at all. However, for the ancients it was their expectation that the Messiah would perform miracles. God always adapts His teaching to our learning, otherwise it would not be teaching at all, least of all Divine teaching--Divine reality Divinely conveyed. It may therefore be safely asserted that to the men of that time no teaching of the new faith would have been real without the evidence of miracles.

Such an observer of these “signs” was Nicodemus, one of the Pharisees and a member of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. From the Gospel-history we know him to have been cautious by nature and education, and timid in character. We can scarcely realize the difficulties he had to overcome to meet Jesus. It must have been a mighty power of

conviction, to break down prejudice to such an extent as to lead this old Sanhedrist to acknowledge a Galilean, untrained in the Schools, as a Teacher come from God, and to go to him for direction on the most delicate and important point in Jewish theology. It was a most compromising step for a Sanhedrist to take, therefore he shrouded his first visit in utmost secrecy. For with that first bold purging of the Temple, a deadly feud existed between Jesus and the Jewish authorities from then on, and of which the sequel could not be doubtful. It was involved in that first encounter in the Temple, and it did not need the experience and wisdom of an aged Sanhedrist to forecast the end. Nevertheless, Nicodemus came.

b. TO NICODEMUS

Read: John 3:1-21

1. Read John 3:1-21 entirely through one time.
(1) No references
2. Read John 3:1
(1) John 7:50-51 (2) John 19:39
3. Read John 3:2
(1) Matthew 22:16 (5) John 10:21
(2) Mark 12:14 (6) John 11:10
(3) Luke 20:21 (7) John 13:30
(4) John 9:4, 16, 33
4. Read John 3:3
(1) No reference
5. Read John 3:4
(1) John 1:13
6. Read John 3:5
(1) Isaiah 32:15 (5) John 1:32
(2) Isaiah 44:3 (6) John 7:39
(3) Ezekiel 36:25-27 (7) John 19:30, 34-35
(4) Joel 3:1-2
7. Read John 3:6
(1) John 6:63 (2) I Corinthians 15:44-50
8. Read John 3:7
(1) No reference
9. Read John 3:8

(1) Ecclesiastes 11:4-5

(2) Acts 2:2-4

10. Read John 3:9-10

(1) No reference

John 3:1-10

- 1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.
- 2 He came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you are doing unless God is with him."
- 3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."
- 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely he cannot reenter his mother's womb and be born again, can he?"
- 5 Jesus answered, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.
- 6 What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit.
- 7 Do not be amazed that I told you, 'You must be born from above.'
- 8 The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."
- 9 Nicodemus answered and said to him, "How can this happen?"
- 10 Jesus answered and said to him, "You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand this?"

Verse 1:

Nicodemus is mentioned only in John (also in 7:50; 19:39); however, the name was a common one. Although the Sanhedrin, the governing body of the Jews, and recognized by the Romans, was mainly composed of the Sadducee element, it also counted Pharisees among its members (cf. Acts 5:34). As a Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, and a rabbi (verse 10), Nicodemus represents the quintessence of Judaism. A theory has been produced which suggests that John contrived this conversation as a sequel to 7:52 which is however not adequately supported. (JBC)

Verse 2:

at night -- In view of the official opposition to Jesus which has already been suggested by John and borne out repeatedly throughout the Gospel, a prominent leader such as Nicodemus could only have come to see Jesus secretly. John also intends a significance like that of 13:30. Nicodemus has come to Jesus out of the darkness (1:5); eventually he became one of Jesus' disciples, and is doubtless one of those mentioned in 12:42. (JBC)

Rabbi -- Nicodemus uses the title used by the disciples upon their recognition of Christ (1:38). (JBC)

we know -- Nicodemus associates himself with those who believed in Jesus because of the signs he had been working (2:23). (JBC)

Verses 1-2:

Nicodemus, a figure not named in the Synoptic Gospels, a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin (7:50), appears here as a furtive seeker after truth, but on his two later appearances shows considerable courage in his relation to Jesus (7:45-52; 19:38-40). He accosts Jesus as Rabbi on the strength of the signs (cf. 2:23) which attest his divine mission and the presence of God with him. A midrash on Deuteronomy 18:19 prescribes: "If a prophet who begins to prophesy (that is, who is still unaccredited) gives a sign and miracle, he is to be listened to, otherwise he is not to be heeded." Jesus accepts the title by answering the unspoken question. Since the nation was aroused by the preaching of the Baptist, the main subject of religious discussion had been the Kingdom of God, its nature, and its near approach. (IB)

Verse 3:

As with the disciples' initial faith, this profession of Nicodemus will be of no value unless it fixes itself upon Jesus as he truly is; therefore, Jesus replies with an enigmatic saying as in 1:51. Nicodemus has said that Jesus is a teacher from God, meaning one whose teaching is truly in accord with God's mind. Jesus will now show him that he is from God in a way that he has not understood. The Kingdom of God is not to be seen merely through the miracles that have impressed Nicodemus. It can only be experienced through a spiritual rebirth (1:12f.) (JBC)

born from above -- As happens frequently in the dialogues of John's Gospel, the expression is obscure enough to permit Nicodemus' retort in the following verse. The original Greek word can mean either "again" or "from above." (JBC)

Verse 4:

Nicodemus takes the statement in a material sense. It is ironical that, as a rabbi, Nicodemus should be puzzled by this figure of "rebirth," since the rabbis used the same expression for proselytes to Judaism. However, the spiritual regeneration of which Jesus speaks goes beyond the capabilities of Judaism. (JBC)

Verses 3-4:

no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above -- This ambiguous oracle perplexed Nicodemus, and there follows the kind of dialogue so frequent in this Gospel. A term is used which can be interpreted literally or spiritually. It is misunderstood, the spiritual interpretation is given and expounded, and soon the dialogue shades off into a discourse (a soliloquy). (IB)

born again -- translates a Greek phrase which means "begotten from above." The adverb in Greek ("again") can mean "from the beginning," "anew," but the Aramaic can only mean "from above," that is, "from God." Birth can be considered either from the father's side, in which the verb is to "beget," or from the mother's side, in which the verb is to "bear." John's metaphor uses the verb from the father's side ("beget"), and with the meaning "beget" (verses 5, 6, 8; 1:13; I John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18). It also has the meaning "bear" in 16:21, and probably in several other passages. (IB)

Verse 5:

Jesus insists on the necessity of spiritual birth for the Kingdom of God, which is the possession only of the children of God. (JBC)

water and Spirit -- In the view of some scholars "water and" is an ecclesiastical interpolation to give the text a sacramental meaning. There is no textual evidence for such an opinion and it must be rejected in view of the obvious structure of the Gospel;

however, it is possible to think that John, in the light of his later Christian knowledge, has made the addition to Jesus' words concerning birth by the Spirit. John is evidently thinking of Christian baptism (cf. verses 22ff.) and intends the Christian reader to do the same. It is not necessary to suppose that Nicodemus would have derived such a developed conception of the way of salvation; if Jesus actually spoke of both water and the Spirit, Nicodemus may have thought of John the Baptist's water-baptism as the introduction to the Spirit-baptism given by Christ. Ezekiel 36:25ff. spoke of the messianic times in terms of water and a new spirit in man. Nicodemus' understanding of "Spirit" would presumably have been that of the Baptist (cf. 1:32f.). (JBC)

Verse 6:

The contrast between flesh (cf. 1:14) and spirit reappears in 6:63. Both terms refer to the constituents of life, but the latter especially was thought of as life-giving, the breath that comes from God (cf. Genesis 2:7; Job 10:9-12; Job 33:4). Flesh is merely the outward manifestation of life; spirit or breath is life itself. Flesh alone can produce only the semblance of life; true life comes from the Spirit of God. (JBC)

Verses 7-8:

blows where it wills -- Christ uses an analogy, which involves a play on words: Both in Aramaic and in Greek the same word renders "spirit,"--"breath" and "wind." Many things that are known can't be explained; they are not seen except in their effects (cf. Ecclesiastes 11:5). (JBC)

Verses 5-8:

The term "begotten from above" is now defined as being "begotten of water and Spirit." If this is taken in the context of a conversation between Jesus and a contemporary Pharisee, the reference must be to the mission of the Baptist, with an emphasis upon that further gift which the forerunner predicted for the Coming One (1:33), for in verse 8 the reference to water is dropped and the birth is simply that of one who is "begotten of the Spirit." Others who regard this as an unhistorical allegory, see in this allusion a polemic against the disciples of John the Baptist and an insistence upon Christian baptism as the outward and visible sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The unpredictable nature of the wind's course illustrates the spontaneity of the divine action in renewing man's spiritual nature all the more easily since both in Greek and in Hebrew the same word is used for both wind and spirit. To see the Kingdom of God (verse 3) is the same as to enter the Kingdom of God (verse 5), as also is to "see (eternal) life" (verse 36). Here alone in this Gospel is found the term Kingdom of God, that is so often used in the Synoptic Gospels. It links this narrative with the earlier tradition. Cf. Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17, or even nearer to John's version is Matthew 18:3. It is shortly after this saying that the Synoptists record a question put to Jesus by one whom Luke calls a "ruler."-- "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17; Matthew 19:16; Luke 18:8). In this passage also, flesh and spirit are antithetical, although in John the flesh is not regarded as the fruitful source and center of sin as it so often is in Paul's writings (cf. Galatians 5:17), for "the Logos became flesh." It stands merely for the physical side of our nature. The emphasis in verse 6 is upon the need for a supernatural birth that we may have "power to become children of God, ... born ... not of the will of the flesh ... but of God" (1:13). (IB)

Verses 9-10:

Nicodemus' further question permits Jesus to point up the paradox: he who is

renowned as a master in Israel does not understand the meaning of the great themes of the OT. (JBC)

Verses 9-11:

To this mystical language Nicodemus listens in amazement, and Jesus replies to his bewilderment, “Are you that famous teacher in Israel and yet you do not understand this?” The difficulty, as we will shortly see, in verse 11 is that the words “truly, truly, I say to you” are found in this Gospel only on the lips of Jesus, and yet the so-called plural of majesty is never on his lips. Moreover, the second person plural is used both in this verse and in verse 12, when the speaker reverts to the first person singular. The best explanation seems to be that the evangelist glides in a polemic against the synagogue of his own time. In the discourses of this Gospel, even when genuine sayings of Jesus are the basis of meditations, the author often applies the original attack upon Jewish unbelief in Jesus to the contemporary controversy. (IB)

Summary from LToJC:

The report of what passed reads, more than almost any other in the Gospels, like notes taken at the time by one who was present. They are only outlines of the conversation, given, in each case, the really important gist, and leaving abrupt gaps between, as would be the manner in such notes. We can scarcely doubt that it was the narrator, John, who was the witness that took the notes. His own reflections upon it in the light of later facts, and under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, is described in the verses with which the writer follows this account of what had passed between Jesus and Nicodemus.

We might infer from John 29:27 that John had a home in Jerusalem itself--which, considering the simplicity of living at the time, and the cost of houses, would not necessarily imply that he was rich--the scene about to be described would have taken place under the roof of John who has given us its record. It was night, and one of the nights in that Easter week which had been so full of marvels. Perhaps we may be allowed to suppose that the spring-wind, sweeping up the narrow streets of Jerusalem, had suggested the comparison, which was so full of deepest teaching to Nicodemus. Up in the simply furnished guest-chamber on the roof the lamp was still burning, and Jesus was still busy with thought and words. There was no need for Nicodemus to pass through the house, for an outside stair led to the upper room. It was night, a time when Jewish superstition would keep men at home, and it was a wild, gusty spring night when loiterers would not be in the streets, and no one would see him at that hour as he ascended the outside steps that led up to the guest-room. His errand was soon told. His one sentence admitted that Jesus taught with divine wisdom, and it implied all the questions he could wish to ask.

Jesus took Nicodemus straight to where alone that Kingdom could be seen. “Except a man be born from above he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” The expression was not uncommon to him, but both the expression and what it implied must be rightly understood. In the first place, it was only a simile, and never meant to convey a real regeneration as in the case of the birth of a child. As far as proselytes were concerned, it meant that having entered into a new relation to God they also entered into a new relationship to man, just as if they had at that moment been newly born. And the old relations had ceased--a man’s father, brother, mother, sister were no longer his nearest of

kin-- he was a new and another man. It also implied a new state when all of a man's past was indeed past, and his sins forgiven him as belonging to that past.

Even if Nicodemus could have imagined that Jesus pointed to repentance, as that which would give him the figurative standing of "born from above," or even "born anew" it would not have helped him. First, this second birth was only a simile. Second, according to the Jewish view, this second birth was a consequence of having taken upon oneself the Kingdom; not, as Jesus put it, the cause and condition of it. The proselyte had taken upon himself the Kingdom, and therefore he was born anew while Jesus put it that he must be born again in order to see the Kingdom of God. Third, it was "a birth from above" to which reference was made. Judaism could understand a new relationship towards God and man, and even the forgiveness of sins. But it had no conception of a moral renovation, a spiritual birth, as the initial condition for reformation, far less as that for seeing the Kingdom of God. And it was because it had no idea of such "birth from above," of its reality or even its possibility, that Judaism could not be the Kingdom of God.

In one respect Nicodemus and Jesus had started from the same premise: The Kingdom of God. But how different were their conceptions of what constituted that Kingdom and of what was its entrance door. What Nicodemus had seen of Jesus had not only shaken the confidence which his former views on these subjects had engendered in him, but it also opened dim possibilities, the very suggestion of which filled him with uneasiness as to the past, and vague hopes as to the future.

To see the Kingdom of God. To understand what means the absolute rule of God, the one high calling of our humanity, by which a man becomes a child of God. To perceive this, not as an improvement upon our present state, but as the submission of heart, mind, and life to Him as our Divine King, an existence which is, and which means, proclaiming unto the world the Kingdom of God. This can only be learned from Christ, and needs even for its perception a kinship of spirit--for that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. To see it, needs the birth from above; to enter it, the double baptismal birth of what John's Baptism had meant, and of what Christ's Baptism was.

Accordingly, all this sounded quite strange and unintelligible to Nicodemus. Here a man might strive, as did the Jews, by outward conformity to *become*, but he would never attain to *being*. But that Kingdom was *spiritual*, and here a man must *be* in order to *become*. How was Nicodemus to attain that new being? Did he hear the sound of that wind as it swept past the guest-room? He heard its voice; but he neither knew from where it came, nor where it went. So was every one that was born of the Spirit. You heard the voice of the Spirit who originated the new being, but the origination of that new being, or its further development into all that it might and would become, lay beyond man's observation.

Nicodemus now understood in some measure what entrance into the Kingdom meant. But its *how* seemed only involved in greater mystery. That it was such a mystery, unthought and unimagined in Jewish theology, was a terribly sad manifestation of what the teaching of Israel was. Yet it had all been told them, as of personal knowledge, by the Baptist and by Jesus; even by the OT if they only could have received it. He wanted to know the *how* of these things before he believed them.

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|-----|---------------------|
| 11. | Read John 3:11 | | |
| | (1) Matthew 11:27 | (3) | John 8:14 |
| | (2) John 3:32-34 | | |
| 12. | Read John 3:12 | | |
| | (1) Wisdom 9:16-17 | (4) | II Corinthians 5:1 |
| | (2) John 6:62-65 | (5) | Philippians 2:10 |
| | (3) I Corinthians 15:40 | (6) | Philippians 3:19-20 |
| 13. | Read John 3:13 | | |
| | (1) Daniel 7:13 | (4) | Romans 10:6 |
| | (2) John 1:18 | (5) | Ephesians 4:9 |
| | (3) John 6:62 | | |
| 14. | Read John 3:14 | | |
| | (1) Numbers 21:4-9 | (3) | John 8:28 |
| | (2) Wisdom 16:5-7 | (4) | John 12:32, 34 |
| 15. | Read John 3:15 | | |
| | (1) No reference | | |
| 16. | Read John 3:16 | | |
| | (1) John 4:9 | | |
| 17. | Read John 3:17 | | |
| | (1) John 5:22, 30 | (3) | John 12:47 |
| | (2) John 8:15-18 | | |
| 18. | Read John 3:18 | | |
| | (1) Mark 16:16 | (2) | John 5:24 |
| 19. | Read John 3:19 | | |
| | (1) John 5:22, 30 | (3) | John 12:47 |
| | (2) John 8:15-18 | | |
| 20. | Read John 3:20 | | |
| | (1) Job 24:13-17 | | |
| 21. | Read John 3:21 | | |
| | (1) Genesis 47:29 (LXX) | (5) | Tobit 4:6 (LXX) |
| | (2) Joshua 2:14 (LXX) | (6) | Tobit 13:6 |
| | (3) II Samuel 2:6 (LXX) | (7) | Isaiah 26:10 (LXX) |
| | (4) II Samuel 15:20 (LXX) | (8) | Matthew 5:14-16 |

John 3:11-21

- 11 Amen, amen, I say to you, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony.
- 12 If I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?
- 13 No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man.
- 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
- 15 so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."
- 16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.
- 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.
- 18 Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
- 19 And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil.
- 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed.
- 21 But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

Verse 11:

Nicodemus was renowned as a master in Israel, yet he had not understood the meaning of the great themes of the OT. In turn, this explains the "we" of the continuation of Jesus' discourse, in which John sees the true Israel giving its testimony. Nicodemus had spoken in behalf of Judaism (verse 2) and as its representative, whereas Jesus speaks for himself and Christianity. (JBC)

we speak of what we know -- What Jesus says comes from his shared knowledge with God the Father (cf. 8:38; 12:50); his words and deeds witness to this fact (5:31ff.; 8:14), but his witness is being rejected (cf. 1:11; 5:43; 12:37). (JBC)

Verse 12:

Up to this point Jesus has been speaking of what should be comparatively easy to understand, at least by analogies. In this sense rebirth and the presence of the Spirit are "earthly things." If Nicodemus cannot understand these, if they cannot bring him to faith in Jesus' true character, then he is obviously in no position to receive the revelation of "heavenly things", that is, mysteries of which faith alone can provide the basis of understanding. In the ensuing verses Nicodemus disappears and the dialogue becomes a monologue, either of Christ or of John or of both. (JBC)

Verse 13:

The "heavenly things" of which Jesus has just spoken cannot be grasped by any man at will. Here the reader may have been reminded of the "Gnostic" mystery religions that pretended to transfer initiates into a realm of heavenly knowledge. The only one

who can speak authoritatively of heavenly things is the only Person who has both come down from Heaven and ascended into Heaven, the Son of Man (1:51). (JBC)

Verses 12-13:

The contrast between earthly things and heavenly things is common to Jewish and Hellenistic writings, and recalls Wisdom 9:16. The earthly things may refer to the Kingdom of God (verses 3, 5), which is God's rule over men in the present age, a kingdom into which men are to enter during their life on earth by a spiritual regeneration. The heavenly things are those mysteries which no man can declare, but which can be made known by the Son of Man, who has descended from heaven. No man has ascended into heaven so as to bring down the divine secret. (IB)

Verse 14:

[the serpent](#) -- The reference is to the incident recorded in Numbers 21:4-9. In Wisdom 16:6f. the bronze serpent is called the "symbol of salvation." The basis of comparison, here is that in both cases salvation has come through a "raising up." (JBC)

[so must the Son of Man be lifted up](#) -- The condition of all the foregoing, of the giving of the Spirit and the introduction of man into the heavenly realm, is the exaltation of Christ. In John the verb "be raised up," has a deliberately double significance when applied to Christ, referring both to his being raised up on the cross (cf. 8:28) and to his glorification in the resurrection and ascension to the Father. (JBC)

Verse 15:

The consequence of the exaltation of Christ is life in him (1:4) for all who believe (1:12). (JBC)

Verses 14-15:

The reference to ascension suggests the double sense in which the verb "to lift up" can be used of Jesus Christ. In this Gospel his exaltation on the cross is never separated from the thought of his exaltation to heaven (cf. 8:28; 12:32-34). In the same way the word for "to glorify" carries an ambiguity, for the glorification of Christ comes through the humiliation of his death (12:23). Verse 14 finds an illustration of this "lifting up" of Christ in the story of Moses and the brazen serpent (Numbers 21:9). The story had already been commented upon in Wisdom 16:6-7. The point of comparison here is that as healing came to the snake-bitten Israelites by looking at the brazen serpent hanging from a pole, so life is given to those who look up with the eyes of faith upon the Son of man hanging on the Cross. At this point we discover the connection of this soliloquy with the conversation with Nicodemus which gave rise to it. The theme of that conversation was the Kingdom of God and the only means of entrance into it. John's synonym for the kingdom is now introduced, and eternal life becomes the theme to the end of the chapter. The gift of eternal life originates in the love of God; its possession depends upon the faith of the recipient (verses 15-16). The constructions in the Greek are different in these two verses. In verse 15 "in him" belongs to "may have eternal life", whereas in verse 16 these words go with the verb "believes." In the first the Son of man is the source of eternal life; in the second he is the object of faith. (IB)

The following passages show very clearly that the Evangelist himself is speaking. (JBC)

Verse 16:

[For God so loved the world](#) -- The only explanation that we shall ever have of the

gift of eternal life made possible for us in the redemption achieved in Christ is the incredible love of God for the world (cf. I John 4:9). Although alienated from God, the world is not evil in itself, and remains the object of divine compassion. (JBC)

he gave his only Son -- John stresses the gratuity of God's love, extending even to this extreme. (JBC)

might not perish -- The question of Christ may be resolved only in belief and eternal life or in rejection and destruction; there is no third alternative. (JBC)

Verses 17-18:

Christ has been sent into the world to bring eternal life (10:10); willful unbelief makes of him the occasion of condemnation. Thus unbelief is its own condemnation, and the unbeliever passes judgment on himself (cf. 12:31). Just as eternal life already begins in this world for those who have decided for Christ, so does the unbeliever already stand condemned. This is the sign of the Son of Man, in whom heaven and earth meet (1:51). (JBC)

Verses 19-20:

These verses anticipate John's conclusion of the Book of Signs (12:37ff.). (JBC)

Verse 21:

The evil-doer is the child of darkness and will not come to the light which is Christ; he who approaches the light, on the other hand, is the one who "does the truth"; this is an OT expression (Genesis 24:49; Ezekiel 18:8f.), meaning to "keep faith." The expression is used in the same sense in the Dead Sea Scrolls. He who does the works that are of God comes to the light. (JBC)

Verses 16-21:

These verses are a reflection by the evangelist rather than part of a conversation. By this time Nicodemus has faded out of the picture, and John is pondering over the mystery of grace by which law and judgment have been superseded by gospel and forgiveness (cf. 1:17-18). The divine initiative and the divine purpose are revealed in the last and greatest of God's redemptive acts. This famous verse 16, which Luther called "the gospel in miniature," is not content with declaring the measure of the divine love; it asserts its outcome on the plane of history. Yet the result of the Incarnation is not an arbitrary fiat in the sphere of redemption. It confronts men with a moral dilemma. Faced with the alternatives, life or perdition, man has himself the responsibility of the choice that determines his destiny. Faith is the activity of the whole personality. It is not merely intellectual but moral in its nature. The antithesis to faith is not doubt, but rather disobedience (verse 36). God's purpose in the mission of his Son is not to condemn but to save (verse 17); yet the reaction of men to this revelation of light determines their end (verse 18), for it is a man's essential character that is brought under judgment (verse 19). The test of that character is its attitude to light. The doer of worthless actions dreads and avoids the light for fear of exposure (verse 20). He who does what is true--an OT expression, meaning to act with regard to reality rather than to pretense and display (cf. I John 1:6) -- welcomes the light for the opportunity of proving that his deeds have been prompted and empowered by God (verse 21; cf. Ephesians 5:13). (IB)

The word translated in this passage "condemn" means literally, "judge", as the corresponding noun is translated "judgment." The judgment is first a decision, and this involves a separation (cf. Matthew 25:31-46) of those approved from those condemned.

In both John and I John the conceptions of a present and of a future judgment are found side by side. The judgment is present in 3:18-21; 5:24, 25, 30; 12:31; 16:11; I John 3:14. It is future in 5:28-29; 12:48; I John 4:17. (IB)

c. TO CERTAIN DISCIPLES

Read: John 3:22-36

22. Read John 3:22-36 entirely through one time.

(1) No references

23. Read John 3:22-23

(1) John 4:1-2

24. Read John 3:24

(1) Matthew 4:12

(4) Mark 6:17

(2) Matthew 14:3

(5) Luke 3:20

(3) Mark 1:14

John 3:22-24

22 After this, Jesus and his disciples went into the region of Judea, where he spent some time with them baptizing.

23 John was also baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was an abundance of water there, and people came to be baptized,

24 for John had not yet been imprisoned.

The strange chronology of this passage (in 3:22 Jesus comes into Judea, whereas in 3:1-21 he was already in Jerusalem) and the fact that verses 31-36 are largely a repetition of verses 13-21 are not necessarily signs of dislocations in the text. Chronology is secondary to John's theological purposes. Rather, the Evangelist seems to have paralleled two narratives touching on the same theme, each followed by a similar meditation. The theme remains Jesus' replacement of the institutions of Judaism--specifically through Christian baptism (cf. 3:4). (JBC)

after this -- Some versions have "some time afterward". Because John does not maintain a precise chronology, the historical antecedent of this episode cannot be determined. (JBC)

into the region of Judea -- Some versions read "into Judean territory." This could mean that Jesus left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside; however, John more than likely thought of Jesus as coming from Galilee, where the Synoptics center his activity. (JBC) [I disagree with the logic of this comment. John was writing his own account of what he had witnessed. Therefore, he would have written from his own standpoint rather than that of the Synoptics.]

baptizing -- According to 4:2 Jesus himself did not baptize; it was rather his disciples who did so. Historically, of course, this was not Christian sacramental baptism; which depends on the giving of the Spirit with the glorification of Christ (7:39). The

baptism of the disciples much have been in the same spirit and for the same purpose as the baptism of John, even as the Synoptic tradition represents Jesus' ministry as beginning where the Baptist left off, preaching of repentance in preparation for the Kingdom (Mark 1:15). However, it was sufficient for the symbolism of John the Evangelist that a baptism that contrasted with the baptism of John should be associated with Christ. (JBC)

Verse 23:

[Aenon near Salim](#) -- This site has not been satisfactorily identified; no doubt it is a real and not a symbolic place. Aenon is probably a transliteration of the Aram "springs." The site is identified by one scholar with an *Ainun*, 7 miles from a Salim that lies to the East of Nablus in Samaria. Tradition from the 4th century perhaps more plausibly connects it with the springs near a Salumias or Sedima about 7 miles south of Beth-shan in the Jordan Valley. (JBC)

Verse 24:

John supposes the Synoptic account of the Baptist's imprisonment to be known (Mark 6:17ff; par.) and situates these events in relation to it. (JBC)

Verses 22-24:

"After this" is a vague indication of time, and since this section is an obvious interruption of the discourse on the heavenly birth, the heavenly revealer, and the divine judgment, it can mean only that after one of his visits to Jerusalem early in his ministry, Jesus left the city for the country parts of Judea, near the Jordan. Some disciples were still with him, and here Jesus carried on a parallel ministry to that of the Baptist. There is no mention of this in any of the Synoptic Gospels, nor is there any mention of Christian baptism elsewhere in the Gospels, except in 4:1-2, where an editorial note corrects an impression that Jesus himself baptized. "The land of Judea" is a vague term, but probably refers to some part of Judea to the northeast, near the borders of Samaria (cf. 4:1-4. Not far away "John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there (verse 23). The last clause shows that this was not on the banks of Jordan, but in some region where there were abundant sources of the streams which flowed down to the Jordan Valley. One scholar favors an identification of Aenon with Ain Farah, the well-watered district near the sources of the Wadi Farah, about two hours' journey north-northeast from Jerusalem, not far from the Wadi Selam, which suggests the name Salim. Another scholar points out that Aenon is a transliteration of the Aramaic word for "sources." As this Gospel tells us nothing about the Baptist's imprisonment and death, this verse may be a gloss by an editor or early copyist who knew that according to the Synoptic tradition, Jesus began his ministry in Galilee after John had been delivered up (Mark 1:14). (IB)

Summary of LToJC:

It was in the late spring, or rather early summer of 27/28 A.D. that John was baptizing in Aenon, near to Salim. In the neighborhood, Jesus and his disciples were similarly engaged. The presence and activity of Jesus while in Jerusalem at the Passover had determined the Pharisaic party to take active measures against him and his forerunner John. As to the outcome of their plans, we notice the discussions on the question of "purification," and the attempt to separate between Christ and the Baptist by exciting the jealousy of the Baptist. But the result was far different. His disciples might have been

influenced, but not John himself. He was too true a man, and too deeply convinced of the reality of Christ's mission, to yield for a moment to such temptation.

It is impossible with certainty to locate the Aenon, near Salim, where John baptized. Ancient tradition placed Salim a few miles south of Scythopolis or Bethshean on the borders of Galilee, or rather, the Decapolis, and Samaria. But as the eastern part of Samaria towards the Jordan was very narrow, one may well believe that the place was close to, perhaps actually in, the north-eastern angle of the province of Judea, where it borders on Samaria. This would be on the western bank of the Jordan. The other, or eastern, bank of the river would be that narrow northern strip of Perea which formed part of the territory of Herod Antipas. Therefore, only a few miles, or the mere crossing of the river, would have brought the Baptist into Perea. There can be no doubt but that the Baptist must either have crossed into, or else that Aenon near Salim, was actually within the dominions of Herod. It was on that occasion that Herod seized on his person, and that Jesus, who was still within Judean territory, withdrew from the intrigues of the Pharisees and the proximity of Herod, through Samaria, and into Galilee.

c. TO CERTAIN DISCIPLES

- Read: John 3:22-36
22. Read John 3:22-36 entirely through one time.
(1) No references
23. Read John 3:22-23
(1) John 4:1-2
24. Read John 3:24
(1) Matthew 4:12 (4) Mark 6:17
(2) Matthew 14:3 (5) Luke 3:20
(3) Mark 1:14

John 3:25-30

- 25 Now a dispute arose between the disciples of John and a Jew about ceremonial washings.
- 26 So they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing and everyone is coming to him."
- 27 John answered and said, "No one can receive anything except what has been given him from heaven.
- 28 You yourselves can testify that I said (that) I am not the Messiah, but that I was sent before him.
- 29 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the best man, who stands and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made complete.
- 30 He must increase; I must decrease."

Verses 25-26:

The baptisms by both the Baptist and Jesus' disciples lead to a controversy over the Jewish purification rites (cf. 2:6), which is in turn the occasion of the Baptist's disciples coming to him with what they consider a legitimate complaint. Their master's prestige is suffering because of the renown of he whom John had pointed out. The best manuscript reading indicates that the controversy was with "a Jew" rather than with "the Jews." The nature of the controversy is not brought out; John considers the matter irrelevant--as does Jesus himself (Mark 7:1ff.)--in relation to the greater things with which the Gospel is concerned. (JBC)

Verses 27-28:

The Baptist's reply to the jealous complaint of his disciples is to put himself humbly in his proper relation to Jesus. His baptism is meaningless unless it had a divine purpose, and he already bore witness (1:20) that the divine purpose was not to herald his own messianic character but that of Jesus. (JBC)

Verse 29:

This protestation is illustrated by a familiar example similar to the one employed by Jesus himself (Mark 2:19). The role of the best man at a wedding was to bring the bride and the bridegroom together, and to rejoice in the bridegroom's happiness. This has been John's function, with which he is content. The example is not chosen at random, in view of the messianic significance of "bridegroom." (JBC)

Verse 30:

The last words of the Baptist in John are his own summation of his role in the history of salvation, parallel to Jesus words in Matthew 11:11. (JBC)

Verses 25-30:

It is difficult to see the connection between verse 25 and what follows. At an early stage in the textual history, the reading "with a Jew" was corrected to "with Jews." But even this seems irrelevant to the context. A feasible modern conjecture would substitute "with (followers) of Jesus," or "with Jesus." A dispute between John's disciples and those of Jesus might well lead to a complaint by John's disciples to their master of the growing success of the rival movement. The dispute was about ritual cleansing, the subject of our Lord's polemic discourse in defense of his disciples on another occasion (Mark 7:1-23). "To whom you bore witness" refers back to 1:15, 26-27, 29-34. John's reply to the jealous loyalty of his disciples means, "We must be content with what God gives." He had told them before that his mission was only that of a pioneer and healer. The marriage feast was in Oriental imagery a favorite symbol for joy; cf. the allusions in Jeremiah 7:34; 16:9; 25:10 to the silence of bride and bridegroom as the sign of complete desolation. In Mark 2:19 Jesus explains that wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them. "The friend of the bridegroom"--in Judea, but not in Galilee, there were two of them, one acting for the bridegroom, the other for the bride--was responsible for arranging the betrothal, with all its commitments, and finally for leading the betrothed couple to the bridal chamber. Therefore he had an important part to play while the ceremonies lasted, but his importance pales in comparison with that of the bridegroom. The emphasis is upon "friend." He is no rival. He rejoices in watching his friend's joy. John the Baptist meant that the hour has now struck which

marks the horizon as the star of the destined Messiah rises. As in all his references to the Baptist, the evangelist emphasizes his subordination to Jesus, but there is no belittlement of the man or his mission. He was sent by God to bear witness to a greater than himself; he faithfully discharged his commission and then, with true magnanimity, stepped aside so that the Christ might have pre-eminence. (IB)

Summary from LToJC:

It was not the greatness of the Christ to his own seeming loss which would cloud the Baptist's convictions. In simple Judean illustration, he was only "the friend of the bridegroom," with all that popular association or higher-Jewish allegory connected with that relationship. He claimed not the bride. His was another joy--that of hearing the Voice of her rightful Bridegroom, whose "groomsman" he was. It was in the sound of that Voice that lay the fulfillment of his office. The evangelist John, looking back upon the relation between the Baptist and Jesus--on the reception of the former and the unique position of "the bridegroom"--points out the lessons of the answer of the Baptist to his disciples (3:31-36) as formerly he did those of the conversation with Nicodemus.

The last recorded testimony of the Baptist had pointed to Christ as the "Bridegroom." John applied this in a manner which appealed to popular custom. As he had pointed out, the presence of Jesus marked the marriage-week. By universal consent and according to Rabbinic Law, this was to be a time of unmixed festivity. Even on the Day of Atonement a bride was allowed to relax one of the ordinances of that strictest fast. During the marriage-week all mourning was to be suspended--even the obligation of the prescribed daily prayers ceased. It was regarded as a religious duty to gladden the bride and bridegroom. It would have been inconsistent on the part of John's disciples to expect "the sons of the bride-chamber" to fast as long as the Bridegroom was with them.

This appeal is still further illustrated by the Talmudic ordinance, which absolved the "friends of the bridegroom," even from the duty of dwelling in booths (at the Feast of Tabernacles). The expression "sons of the bride-chamber", which means all the invited guests, has more significance when we remember that the Covenant-union between God and Israel was not only compared to a marriage, but the Tabernacle and the Temple were designated as the "bridal-chamber." Since the institution of "friends of the bridegroom" prevailed in Judea, but not in Galilee, this marked distinction of the "friends of the bridegroom" in the mouth of the Judean John the Evangelist, and "sons of the bride-chamber", in that of the Galilean Jesus, is itself evidence of historic accuracy, as well as the Judean authorship of the Gospel of John.

Painfully minute, Judaistic self-introspection is contrary to the spirit of the joyous liberty of the children of God. It is only a sense of sin, and the felt absence of Jesus, which should lead to mourning and fasting, although not in order thereby to avert either the anger of God or outward calamity. Besides the evidentiary force of this highly spiritual, and thoroughly un-Jewish view of fasting, we notice some other points in confirmation of this, and of the Gospel-history generally.

The hour of the seeming abasement of the Baptist was, in truth, that of the highest exaltation, as marking the fulfillment of his own office, and therefore, of his joy. John the Baptist would experience in the near future hours of cloud and darkness.

- (1) John 8:23
32. Read John 3:32
(1) John 3:11
33. Read John 3:33-34
(1) John 8:26 (3) I John 5:10
(2) John 12:44-50
34. Read John 3:35
(1) Matthew 11:27 (3) Luke 10:22
(2) Matthew 28:18 (4) John 13:3
35. Read John 3:36
(1) John 3:16 (2) I John 5:13

John 3:31-36

- 31 The one who comes from above is above all. The one who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of earthly things. But the one who comes from heaven (is above all).
- 32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony.
- 33 Whoever does accept his testimony certifies that God is trustworthy.
- 34 For the one whom God sent speaks the words of God. He does not ration his gift of the Spirit.
- 35 The Father loves the Son and has given everything over to him.
- 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him.

These verses continue, or parallel, the monologue of 3:26-21; however, they also have reference to the preceding episode. (JBC)

Verse 31:

The one who comes -- The title of the Messiah (1:15, 27). (JBC)

from above -- Jesus is not merely the Messiah, but the bringer of heavenly life (cf. 3:3). (JBC)

above all -- He is beyond all that is merely earthly, which includes both the purifications of the Jews and John's baptism. (JBC)

The one who is of the earth -- Earth" and "the earthly" is not the same as "world" and "the world". (JBC)

speaks of earthly things -- Compare Jesus' words to Nicodemus in verse 12, in which "earthly things" were understood as a preparation for "heavenly things." The preaching of John the Baptist and the old covenant would be examples of "earthly things." (JBC)

Verse 32:

This verse repeats the thought of 3:11. (JBC)

Verse 33:

Whoever receives the testimony of Christ certifies to God's truthfulness even as

God certifies to the truthfulness of Christ (cf. 6:27); it is to the truthfulness of God that he testifies, since Christ is the messenger of God (12:44ff.; I John 5:10). (JBC)

Verse 34:

He does not ration his gift of the Spirit -- The prophets of the old covenant, of which John the Baptist was one, communicated with God's Spirit; but the fullness of God's revelation has come only in Christ (cf. 1:17f.). (JBC)

Verse 35:

For love as the explanation of the revelation of God in Christ see 3:16; 10:17; 15:9. (JBC)

has given everything over to him -- Christ's work is in every sense God's, an exercise of complete authority (cf. 5:22ff.; 17:2ff.; Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). (JBC)

Verse 36:

This verse reproduces the thought of 3:18. (JBC)

After the intrusive narrative about the rivalry of John's disciples, and of the Baptist's reiterated testimony of Christ, the closing section of this chapter resumes the meditation of verses 16-21. Apart from the subject matter, verse 32b is out of harmony with verse 26. (IB)

The theme is the superior value of a heavenly witness spoken by One who speaks of what he has seen and heard. This testimony is given by the Son to whom the Father has entrusted full authority in his mission to earth, so that his words are God's words, and acceptance of his message brings the believer into the life that is from above, while refusal to accept it robs the unbeliever of this life, so that the "wrath", the divine reaction against sin, is continually hanging over him (for this technical term in Jewish eschatology, see Romans 1:18; 2:5; 5:9; Ephesians 3:6; Colossians 3:6; I Thessalonica 1:10; 2:16; Revelation 6:16). (IB)

There are unmistakable echoes of the earlier section of this discourse. "He who speaks from above" (verse 31) corresponds to the title "he who descended from heaven" (verse 13)--the timeless Logos who in his incarnate life speaks heavenly truth in the language of earth. The Son, whom the Father loves, "whom God has sent" (verses 34-35), recalls the only Son whom God has given in love to the world (verse 16). The witness he bears to "what he has seen and heard" (verse 32) constitutes his testimony regarding "heavenly things" (verse 12). The revelation spoken by the Son as it elicits faith or provokes disobedience (verse 36) is the criterion of life or death, as is the coming of light in the revelation of his life (verses 19-21). (IB)

Verses 32-34:

"No one receives his testimony" is a comprehensive generalization which probably reflects the evangelist's on the Jewish nation as a whole for its rejection of its own Messiah (cf. 1:11). As in 1:12; 8:16, the sweeping negative is modified by the exception (verse 33) which proves the rule. The man whose insights are conditioned merely by his nature "in the flesh" cannot discern the meaning of that which originates in the realm of the Spirit (I Corinthians 2:9-12). The man of faith can receive the witness, for he recognizes in Jesus one whose life and teaching are identical; they are both self-authenticated as a true disclosure of the character and purpose of God (cf. I John 5:10). Without searching for further evidence, the believer attests that the divine revelation of

love in the Incarnation is worthy of acceptance as coming from the God who is real and reliable. Other prophets have come with fleeting and fugitive inspiration. There is a rabbinical saying, "The Holy Spirit which abides on the prophets does not abide except by measure." On the other hand, it is here (verse 34) said of Jesus: "For it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit;" that is, the Father does not bestow the Spirit upon Jesus except in its fullness, as a constant endowment. Some authorities omit the object (the Spirit), and many do not express the subject, but in any case those manuscripts which supply the name of God give the obvious meaning. (IB)

Verse 35:

For the love of the Father toward the Son--a characteristic idea of this Gospel--cf. 5:20; 10:17; 15:9-10; 17:23-24, 26; and for John's thought of the delivery of authority by the Father to the Son, cf. 5:22, 26-27; 6:37; 12:49; 14:31; 17:2, 4, 11, 21. (IB)

SESSION 19

d. THE ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Matthew 14:3-5

Mark 6:17-20

Luke 3:19-20

1. Read Matthew 14:3-5 entirely through one time.
(1) No reference
2. Read Matthew 14:3-4
(1) Luke 3:19-20
3. Read Matthew 14:4
(1) Leviticus 18:16 (2) Leviticus 20:21
4. Read Matthew 14:5
(1) Matthew 21:26

Matthew 14:3-5

- 3 Now Herod had arrested John, bound (him), and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip,
- 4 for John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her."
- 5 Although he wanted to kill him, he feared the people, for they regarded him as a prophet.

No comment were found in JBC for these three verses.

Verse 3:

Josephus tells a different story of John's death (Antiquities. XVIII. 5. 1-2). Antipas married the daughter of Aretas who was king of Nabataean Arabia (9 B.C. - 40 A.D.), but he fell in love with Herodias, who was wife of his half-brother. Josephus does not call this brother "Philip." The tetrarch Philip, mentioned in Luke 3:1, married his half niece Salome, the daughter of Herodias. Aretas' daughter, discovering Antipas' plan to marry Herodias, fled to her father, who made war on Antipas. Such a marriage was forbidden by Leviticus 20:21, but a glance at the Herodian family tree will show that the Herods paid no attention to the degrees of relationship within which marriage was prohibited. (IB)

Verse 4:

Josephus says nothing about John's denunciation of the marriage, and merely remarks that "Herod, fearing lest his great influence over the people might lead to some revolt--for they seemed to do anything he counseled--thought it much better to execute him first, before any revolutionary movement should arise because of him, than to the get himself into difficulties and regret, after it was too late, that he had not acted." This attitude is not surprising, since Galilee was the scene of more than one revolt in the first

century. Accordingly, Josephus says, John was sent to Machaerus, a fortress near the Dead Sea, and put to death there. When, at a later time, Herod's army was destroyed by Aretas, the people considered this a just punishment sent by God for what he had done to the Baptist. The story in the Gospels is no doubt the version told in the villages. It is difficult to reconcile it with Josephus. (IB)

5. Read Mark 6:17-20 entirely through one time.

(1) No reference

6. Read Mark 6:17

(1) Luke 3:19-20

7. Read Mark 6:18

(1) Leviticus 18:16

8. Read Mark 6:19-20

(1) No references

Mark 6:17-20

17 Herod was the one who had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, whom he had married.

18 John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

19 Herodias harbored a grudge against him and wanted to kill him but was unable to do so.

20 Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man, and kept him in custody. When he heard him speak he was very much perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him.

Verse 17:

Upon the orders of Herod. John was seized and imprisoned. According to Josephus (Antiquities. 18. 5, 2), Herod imprisoned John in the fortress of Machaerus on the east side of the Dead Sea, where he was eventually put to death. (JBC)

on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip -- [The Herod family was known for their intrigues in married life, paying no attention to any of the Jewish ordinances surrounding relationships between husband and wife. MINE] (JBC)

Herod Antipas was not "king" (as in verses 14, 27), but tetrarch of Galilee and Perea; it was not his brother Philip's wife whom he had taken but the wife of another brother, Herod, by whom she had a daughter Salome, born ca. 10 A.D.--this Salome (not Herodias) was the wife of Philip (Josephus. Antiquities. XVIII. 5. 4). Antipas' first wife was the daughter of Aretas IV, the Arabian king, and he cast her off for Herodias; hence the war with Aretas and the destruction of Herod's army. The popular view was that this defeat was a divine judgment upon Antipas for the murder of the prophet (Josephus, Antiquities). (IB)

Verse 18:

It is not lawful -- The Gospels assign John's rebuke of Herod's adultery as the reason for his death; this does not prevent the further reason mentioned by Josephus-- Herod's fear that John's influence might eventually enable him to instigate a rebellion against him. (JBC)

"Not lawful": Herodias was still his "brother's wife," if the brother was still living--this would be the Christian judgment (cf. 10:11-12). If Herodias was divorced, Antipas could not marry her, according to the Mosaic law (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21); even if her husband was dead, the marriage was unlawful, since she had a child, and the levirate rule (Deuteronomy 25:5), could not be invoked--though technically the law provided for the case in which no son had been born, and Salome was a daughter. But possibly the story as originally told meant "It is not right"; cf. 3:4 and 10:2, where the Pharisees certainly know what is "lawful." John the Baptist is not represented as an expounder of Torah. (IB)

Verse 20:

Herod feared John -- Some versions read "Herod stood in awe of John." Just as the disciples (4:41; 9:32; 10:32), the people (5:15), the healed woman (5:33), even the high priests and scribes (11:18) stood in awe of Jesus. There is in this scene a certain John-Jesus typology. (JBC)

a righteous and holy man -- An early Christian formula applied to Christ (Acts 3:14). (JBC)

he liked to listen to him -- Just as "the mass of the people liked to hear" Jesus (12:37). (JBC)

Verses 19-20:

kept him in custody -- Some versions read "kept him safe" is in striking contrast to Josephus' narrative. It is possible that they serve later apologetic interests. (IB)

When he heard him speak he was very much perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him -- The KJV reads "did many things" which is the reading of some manuscripts and versions, but others read "he was much perplexed" as in the RSV. Something has gone wrong with the text at this point (verse 20b); it has been conjectured that it may be a gloss. On the basis of Luke 9:7 another scholar suggests that the words have slipped in here from 6:16 where they originally stood. (IB)

9. Read Luke 3:19-20 entirely through one time.

(1) Matthew 14:3-4

(2) Mark 6:17-18

Luke 3:19-20

- 19 Now Herod the tetrarch, who had been censured by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil deeds Herod had committed,
20 added still another to these by (also) putting John in prison.

Verse 19-20:

Verses 18-20 are an editorial note. God's gift of Christ to mankind was the content of the early Christian gospel. Because John had proclaimed the Messiah's coming, Luke can say "he preached the good news to the people." There is no version here or later of Mark's narrative of John's execution (Mark 6:19-29), although Luke 9:9

(Mark 6:16) assumes that the readers of the Gospel are familiar with it. "Herod" Antipas had married "Herodias" after divorcing a daughter of the Nabataean king Aretas (Josephus. *Antiquities*. XVIII. 5.1) Mark had erroneously identified Herodias' first husband with Philip, who was her son-in-law. Her former marriage had been with an older half brother of Herod, also known as Herod. If Luke knew the complicated Herodian family tree, his reading "his brother's wife" is a deliberate correction. Mark appears to assume that "Herod ... shut up John in prison" at Tiberius. Josephus declares that the site of the Baptist's imprisonment as well as of his execution was Machaerus, a fortress in Perea to the east of the Dead Sea. (IB)

Summary from LToJC:

The slight variations which occur here in the Synoptic Gospels also exist in many of the other narratives of the same events by the different Evangelists. This should not be explained away in order to rid oneself of the problem. The sound critic should never devise an explanation for the sake of a supposed difficulty, but truthfully study the text--as an interpreter, not as an apologist. Such variations of detail present no difficulty. As against a merely mechanical, unspiritual accord, they afford evidence of truthful, independent witness, and undisputed proof that, contrary to modern negative criticism, the three narratives are not merely different revisions of one and the same original document.

If we suppose Antipas to have been at his residence in Julias, in Perea, he would have been in closest proximity to the scene of the Baptist's last recorded labors at Aenon. In Perea, Antipas had two palaces, the one at Julias, and another at Machaerus which was the place of the Baptist's imprisonment and martyrdom.

There were perhaps three motives behind the arrest of John the Baptist. According to Josephus, the tetrarch was afraid that his absolute influence over the people, who seemed disposed to carry out whatever the Baptist advised, might lead to a rebellion. This circumstance is also indicated in the remark of Matthew, that Herod was afraid to put the Baptist to death on account of the people's opinion of him. On the other hand, the Evangelic statement, that Herod had imprisoned John on account of his declaring his marriage with Herodias unlawful, is in no way inconsistent with the reason assigned by Josephus. Not only might both motives have influenced Antipas, but there is an obvious connection between them. John's open declaration of the unlawfulness of Antipas' marriage, as unlike incestuous and adulterous, might in view of the influence which the Baptist exercised, have easily led to a rebellion. The sacred text may also provide us with an indication of a third motive which led to John's imprisonment, and which may have given final weight to the other two grounds of enmity against him.

It has been suggested that Antipas must have been attached to the Sadducees, if he was attached to any religious party, because such a man would not have connected himself with the Pharisees. This reasoning is, however, singularly inconclusive. On political grounds, Antipas would scarcely have lent his weight to the Sadducean or aristocratic priest-party in Jerusalem; while, religiously, only too many instances are on record of what the Talmud itself calls those "painted ones," who are like the Pharisees. Furthermore, the Pharisees may have used Antipas as their tool, and worked upon his wretched superstition to effect their own purposes. [This is what Edersheim supposes to

have been the case.] The reference to the Pharisaic spying and to their comparisons between the influence of Jesus and John (which we will see later), which led to the withdrawal of Christ into Galilee, seems to imply that the Pharisees had something to do with the imprisonment of John. We can remember that the Lord unmasked their hypocrisy by bidding them go back to Antipas (Luke 13:31-33), showing that he knew that real danger threatened Him, not from the tetrarch, but from the leaders of the party in Jerusalem. Therefore, the inference is that Pharisaic intrigue had a very large share in giving effect to Antipas' fear of the Baptist.

We suppose, then, that Antipas was at Julias, in the immediate neighborhood of Aenon, at the time of John's imprisonment. But, according to Josephus, whose testimony there is no reason to question, the Baptist was committed to the strong fortress at Machaerus. If Julius lay where the Wadi Heshbon enters into the Jordan, then east of that river and a little north of the Dead Sea, we can locate Machaerus straight south of that point. In fact, Machaerus marked the extreme point south in Perea. As the boundary fortress in the south-east (towards Arabia), its safety was of the greatest importance, and everything was done to make the place impregnable. It had been built at an earlier time, but later destroyed in the wars of Pompey. Herod the Great had not only restored it, but also greatly enlarged it, and surrounded it by the best defenses known at the time. In fact, Herod the Great built a town along the shoulder of the hill, and surrounded it also by walls which were fortified by towers. Within the enclosure of the castle located there Antipas had built a magnificent palace. Josephus describes even its natural position as unassailable. The highest point of the fort was on the west, where it looked sheer down into a valley. North and south the fort was equally cut off by valleys, which could not be filled up for siege purposes. The weak point was on the east where there was a valley one hundred cubits deep, but it terminated in a mountain opposite Machaerus.

Today, a rugged line of upturned squared stones shows the old Roman road to Machaerus. Ruins covering a square mile, on a group of undulating hills mark the site of the ancient town of Machaerus. Although surrounded by a wall and towers, its position is supposed to have not been strategically defensible. Today there can be found here only a mass of ruins with traces of a temple dedicated to the Syrian sun-god, broken cisterns, and desolateness all around. By crossing a narrow deep valley, about a mile wide, one can climb up to the ancient fortress on a conical hill. Altogether it covered a ridge that was more than a mile square. The key of the position was a citadel to the extreme east of the fortress. It occupied the summit of the cone, it was isolated, and it was almost impregnable, but it was also very small. Meanwhile, descending a steep slope about 150 yards toward the west, one can reach the oblong flat plateau that formed the fortress, containing Herod's magnificent palace. Here, carefully collected, are piled up stones of which the citadel was built.

Passing on among the ruins, one find no traces of the royal palace remaining with the exception of its foundations, and the enormous stones that are upturned. At the very end of this long fortress in the west, and looking southward, is a square fort. Returning one's sight through what is regarded as the ruins of the magnificent castle-palace of Herod, to the highest and strongest part of the defenses--on the steep slope 150 yards up, can be found the eastern stronghold or the citadel. The foundations of the walls all around, to the height of a yard or more above the ground, are still standing. One can

clamber over them to examine the interior, and notice how small the stronghold was: exactly 100 yards in diameter. There are scarcely any remains of it left. A well of great depth, a deep cemented cistern with the vaulting of the roof still complete, and then one can see two dungeons, one of them deep down, its sides scarcely broken in, “with small holes still visible in the masonry where staples of wood and iron had once been affixed.” As one looks down into its hot darkness, one shudders in realization that this terrible stronghold had for almost ten months been the prison of John the Baptist, that bold herald of the coming Kingdom, that humble, earnest, self-denying forerunner.

As one withdraws from gazing into the piercing gloom of the dungeon, and looks about at the ruins around, one would be standing on a height of not less than 8,800 feet above the Dead Sea. In a straight line it seems not more than four or five miles; and the road down to it is reached by a series of ledges and steps. Far to the south stretches the rugged wilderness of Judea, bounded by the hills of Hebron. Here nestles Bethlehem, and over there is Jerusalem. Turning around, and looking into the deep cleft of the Jordan Valley, the oasis of beauty seen is Jericho. Beyond Jericho, the Jordan winds through burnt, desolate-looking country, until it is lost from view in the haze which lies upon the edge of the horizon. As the eye of the Baptist probably traveled over it, he could follow all the scenes of his life and labors, from the home of his childhood in the hill-country of Judea, to those over many years of solitude and communing with God in the wilderness, and then to the place of his preaching and Baptism, and then even onwards to the place where he had last spoken to Christ, just before his own captivity. The deep dungeon in the citadel was on one side, while on the other side, and down that slope, was the luxurious palace of Antipas and his adulterous wife. John the Baptist could have heard the shouts of wild revelry and drunken merriment that could be found within that palace.

John the Baptist would pass from his dungeon to the palace to speak with Antipas, at the latter's request. Then he would have to return along the same path from each interview to his deep dungeon. When Antipas heard him, he was much perplexed. We can understand his perplexity since he “feared him, knowing that he was a righteous man and holy”, but yet he still enjoyed listening to him. Antipas most likely realized the hopelessness of his case. By placing the arrest and imprisonment of John the Baptist in this position, we can now continue on, and understand more clearly the reasons why Jesus was eager to escape into Galilee to continue his preaching. Furthermore, since John the Baptist was imprisoned for about nine months before he was executed, there were many other events taking place during that nine months of imprisonment, and prior to his execution.

4. PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM IN SAMARIA -- 27 AD
 - a. TO A SAMARITAN WOMAN
Matthew 4:12
John 4:1-38
10. Read Matthew 4:12
 - (1) Mark 1:14-15
 - (2) Luke 4:14 and 31

Matthew 4:12

12 When he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee.

We may conjecture that the preaching of John had aroused a climax of interest into which Jesus could now move with his own proclamation. All three Synoptics also agree that Jesus returned to Galilee, his own country, to proclaim the reign. (JBC)

The execution of John the Baptist is told in Luke 14:3-12. Luke, for artistic reasons, mentions this before the baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:19-20). The Gospel of John assigns an extensive ministry before John's arrest (John 3:22-30). (IB)

The machinations of the Pharisaic party in Jerusalem had led Jesus to withdraw into Galilee. (LToJC)

Summary from LToJC:

The Baptist has been arrested, and was being held in the stronghold at Machaerus --he was now the prisoner of Antipas. The dominions of Antipas embraced in the north: Galilee, west of the Jordan and the Lake of Galilee, and in the south: Perea, east of the Jordan. Crossing the lake eastwards, one would pass from the possessions of Antipas to those of the tetrarch Philip, or otherwise come upon the territory of the "Ten Cities", or Decapolis, a kind of confederation of townships, with constitution and liberties, such as those of the Grecian cities. By a narrow strip northwards, Perea just slipped in between the Decapolis and Samaria.

[Possibly one of the reasons for Jesus withdrawing into Galilee was because he felt somewhat safer in preaching outside the bounds of the religionists in Jerusalem.

11. Read John 4:1-38 entirely through one time.

(1) No references

12. Read John 4:1-3

(1) No references

John 4:1-3

1 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John
2 (although Jesus himself was not baptizing, just his disciples),
3 he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

Verses 1-3:

A note on the growing hostility of official Judaism serves as a preface to the narrative which follows and helps to bring out by contrast the favorable reception that Jesus receives from the Samaritans. The chronology is uncertain, but presumably this related to a time after the Baptist's imprisonment. The resentment aroused by the Baptist's activity (Matthew 21:25ff; par.) has now been transferred to Jesus. (JBC)

These introductory verses explain the reason for Jesus journey from Judea to Galilee, and for his contact with the people of Samaria. The Pharisees were jealous of the

popularity of the new movement, which exceeded even that of the Baptist in the Judean territory. The Synoptic Gospels are silent about baptism as an accompaniment of the ministry of Jesus, and an editorial note here limits this function to his disciples. The direct route from Judea to Galilee lay through the region of Samaria. Although Samaria formed a part of the sub-province of Judea, it nevertheless fell under the rule of the Roman procurator. The place was inhabited by a mixed population which had been separated sharply from the Jews since the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Luke 9:51-56 illustrates the inhospitality shown to Jesus and his disciples on one of these journeys. For this reason, the alternative route by way of Perea was more popular.

Summary from LToJC:

We have no means of determining how long Jesus may have tarried in Jerusalem after the events of the purging of the Temple and the discussion with Nicodemus. The Evangelic narrative only marks an indefinite period of time which from internal probability cannot have been an extended stay there. From the city He retired with His disciples to the country which formed the province of Judea. There he taught and his disciples baptized. From what had been so lately witnessed in Jerusalem, as well as from what must have been known as to the previous testimony of the Baptist concerning him, the number of those who professed adhesion to the expected New Kingdom, and were consequently baptized, was as large in that locality as had submitted to the preaching and Baptism of John--perhaps even larger. An exaggerated report was carried to the Pharisaic authorities which said that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John had. From this we can infer that the opposition of the leaders to the party of the Baptist was now settled, and that it extended onward to Jesus; and also, what careful watch they evidently kept over the new movement.

What seems strange at first is that Jesus should have, for a time, established Himself in such close proximity to the Baptist, and that he should have allowed his disciples to administer the rite of Baptism on this occasion only. We need to remember the essential difference between the two baptisms. The Baptist's was one of repentant preparation for the coming Kingdom which had deepest of meanings; the disciples of Jesus' baptism would have been one of baptism into that Kingdom itself, and into the teaching of its King. Even if it were otherwise, the administration of the same rite by John and by the disciples of Jesus in apparently close proximity, seems not only unnecessary, but it might give rise to misconception on the part of his enemies, and misunderstanding or jealousy on the part of weak disciples. The last spoken words of John the Baptist had been to say in effect "I must decrease while He increases", then on this exceptional occasion Jesus sanctioned the administration of the Baptism of John. It was not a retrogression from the position he had taken in Jerusalem, nor was it caused by the refusal of His Messianic claims in the Temple. There is no retrogression, only progression in the life of Jesus. Yet it was only on this occasion that the rite was administered under His sanction. In the circumstances they were exceptional. John's last testimony to Jesus had been given, and it was testified to by this testimony of Jesus to John. The baptismal rite of John which was administered with the sanction of Jesus, was the highest witness that could be given to John's former work.

Jesus was within the boundaries of the province of Judea at the time John had been baptizing at Aenon near to Salim. Already there had been causes at work to remove

both Jesus and his forerunner from their present spheres of activity. John the Baptist had become involved in the machinations of the Pharisaic party in Jerusalem partly because of his close connections with Jesus. The imprisonment of John, although it was occasioned by his outspoken rebuke of Antipas, was in great part also due to the intrigues of the Pharisees. Of such a connection between them and Herod Antipas, we have direct evidence in a similar attempt to bring about the removal of Jesus from his territory (Luke 13:31-32). It would not have been difficult to rouse the suspicions of a nature so mean and jealous as that of Antipas, and this may explain the account of Josephus who attributes the imprisonment and death of the Baptist simply to Antipas' suspicious fear of John's unbounded influence with the people.

14. Read John 4:4
(1) No references

15. Read John 4:5
(1) Genesis 33:18-19 (3) Joshua 24:32
(2) Genesis 48:22

16. Read John 4:6
(1) No references

John 4:4-6

- 4 He had to pass through Samaria.
5 So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.
6 Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon.

Verse 4:

The most direct route, a three-day journey, from Judea to Galilee ran through the territory of the Samaritans, who were often hostile to Judeans and Galileans (cf. Luke 9:51ff.). The Synoptic tradition contains no record of Jesus' ministry among the Samaritans; but then it is quite sketchy on the subject of his activity outside Galilee, and Samaria formed a political unit with Judea. Possibly John's interest in the Samaritans was prompted by the adaptability of their interpretation of Judaism to the new revelation of Christianity; this may also account for the Samaritan's receptiveness to the apostolic preaching (Acts 8:1-25). (JBC)

a town of Samaria -- In all the Greek manuscripts it is called "Sychar"; this is thought by some to be a corruption of "Sychem" (Shechem), which was indeed "near the field which Jacob had given to his son Joseph" (cf. Genesis 33:19; 48:22; Joshua 24:32). Shechem (Tell el-Balatah) was inhabited during Jesus' time, but it is questionable whether the number of dwellings would have constituted a town. A nearby town known today as Askar may have been the Sychar of this episode. (JBC)

Verse 6:

There is no question about the location of Jacob's well, which lies between Tell-el-Balaatah and Askar. According to one source, Jesus sat down "on the ground" rather than "at the well." (JBC)

Verses 4-6:

"Sychar" in verse 5 is generally identified with the modern "Askar, a village in the valley about halfway between the two mountains, and about a mile north of Jacob's well. About halfway between them is the traditional site of Joseph's tomb (Genesis 33:19; 48:22; Joshua 24:32). Although Jacob's well is not mentioned in the OT, there can be little doubt about the place described in the following narrative. There must have been some reason for a well having been dug out to a depth of more than a hundred feet in a locality where streams run down from the mountain slopes in such abundance. The shaft is seven and a half feet wide and is cut through a thick bed of soil and lower down through soft rock. The water filters in through the sides, so that it is both a "spring" and a "rain pit." The track that Jesus would probably take runs to the east of Ebal, avoiding the steep gradients of the road through Shechem (Nablus) and Samaria (Sebaste), as well as the unfriendly population of the large towns--for Samaria was largely Greek and Shechem strongly Samaritan (Matthew 10:5-6). While he rested by the well at the fork of the roads, weary with travel and the heat of the midday sun, his disciples went to Shechem to buy provisions for their journey (verse 8). From Jacob's well Mount Gerizim towered to the southwest of the valley, while to the east stretched for miles the valley fertile with fields of wheat. (IB)

The Samaritan religion was based upon the Pentateuch, and its cultus had been centered in the temple on Mount Gerizim. Where the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 27:4 records the divine command that after crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land, the Israelites were to build a stone altar on Mount Ebal for burnt offerings, the Samaritan Pentateuch substitutes Gerizim for Ebal. The reason is to be found in Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:12, where Ebal is the mount of cursing and Gerizim the mount of blessing. (IB)

Summary from LToJC:

The Gospel of John is the only one which tells of the early Judean ministry of Jesus, and the journey through Samaria, which preceded the Galilean ministry. The shorter route from Judea to Galilee led through Samaria; and this, according to Josephus, was generally taken by the Galileans on their way to the capital. But the Judeans seem chiefly to have taken a detour through Perea, in order to avoid hostile and impure Samaria. It did not lay within the scope of Jesus' personal ministry to extend it, especially at its beginning, beyond the boundaries of Israel, and the expression, "He had to pass through Samaria" can only refer to the advisability in the circumstances of taking the most direct road, or even to the wish of avoiding Perea as the seat of Antipas' government.

Such prejudices in regard to Samaria, as those which affected the ordinary Judean devotee, would not influence the conduct of Jesus. The term "Samaritans" was designated to them by the Jews, as a term of reproach to mark that they were of foreign race, and to repudiate all connection between them and the Jews. It is still impossible to believe that during the time of Jesus the "Samaritans" did not contain a considerable

admixture of the elements of Israel. It is difficult to suppose that the original deportation was so complete as to leave behind no traces of the original inhabitants of Israel. Their number would probably be swelled by fugitives from Assyria, and by Jewish settlers in the troublesome times that followed. Later they were largely increased by apostates and rebels against the order of things established by Ezra and Nehemiah. When reconstructing the Jewish community, they insisted on a strict separation between those who had returned from Babylon and the Samaritans. They also resisted the Samaritans offers of co-operation and their attempts at hindrance. This embittered the national feelings of jealousy that were already existent, and it led to a constant hostility between Jews and Samaritans which has continued even up to our own time. The religious separation became final when the Samaritans built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim. By impudent assertion and falsification of the text of the Pentateuch, Gerizim was declared the rightful center of worship, and the doctrines and rites of the Samaritans exhibited a curious imitation and adaptation of those prevalent in Judaism.

So many of their views were simply corruptions of those of the Jews. From the want of an authenticated ancient literature, the origin and meaning of many of them have been forgotten. Their temple was built not in Samaria, but at Shechem. In the Samaritan Pentateuch the Mount of Gerizim was substituted for Mount Ebal (Deuteronomy 27:4). The real capital of the Samaritans was Shechem, with its sacred associations of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. Shechem survives today in the modern Nablus. There were many battles which occurred in Samaria between the inhabitants there and the various nations (Egypt, Syria, Greece, Rome) who attempted to take over their land.

Although western Palestine is divided into the provinces of Judea, Samaria and Galilee, the Rabbis (whose ideas were shaped by the observances of Judaism, ignore this division. For them Palestine consisted only of Judea, Perea, and Galilee. Samaria was nothing more than a strip intervening between Judea and Galilee. Nevertheless, it was not regarded like heathen lands, instead it was pronounced clean in Jesus' time. Samaria occupied the ancient territories of Manasseh and Ephraim, and it extended about 48 miles (north and south); by forty (east and west). The political enmity and religious separation between Jews and Samaritans account for their mutual jealousy. On all public occasions the Samaritans took the part hostile to Jews, while they seized every opportunity of injuring and insulting them. The Samaritans' hostile actions against the Jews were retaliated against by the Jews treating them with every mark of contempt; by accusing them of falsehood, folly, and irreligion; and (what they felt most keenly) by disowning them as of the same race or religion, and this in the most offensive terms of assumed superiority and self-righteous fanaticism.

Elaborate attempts have been made to show what articles of food the disciples of Jesus might have bought in Samaria, in ignorance that almost all would have been lawful, meaning they would be in accordance with the ordinances of Jewish law. Complicating the matter is the fact that the term *Samaritans* was often purposely substituted for "Sadducees, and "heretics"; that is, the term Samaritans was often substituted for Christians. The terms Samaritans, Sadducees, and heretics are used so interchangeably that a careful inquiry is necessary, to show in each case which of them is really meant.

On certain points Jewish opinion remained always the same, the judgment passed on the Samaritans, especially as to intercourse with them, varied according to how the

Samaritans showed either more or less active hostility toward the Jews. Yet they were not treated as heathens, and their land, their springs, baths, houses, and roads were declared clean by the legal authorities in Judaism.

Matters proceeded so far, that they were eventually entirely excluded from fellowship. A couple of centuries following Christ's death the Jews went so far as to say -- to partake of their bread was like eating swine's flesh. There is, however, a great difference between what was in the Rabbinic literature and the opinions prevailing at the time of Jesus. In the Rabbinic tractate on the Samaritans, it is admitted, that in most of their usages they resembled Israelites, and many rights and privileges are conceded to them, from which a heathen would have been excluded. Their meat is declared clean if an Israelite witnessed its killing, or a Samaritan ate of it. Even their bread and their wine (under certain conditions) are allowed. At the time of Jesus all their food was declared lawful. There could, therefore, be no difficulty regarding the purchase of food on the part of the disciples of Jesus.

Most of the peculiar doctrines of the Samaritans were derived from Jewish sources. As might be expected, their tendency was Sadducean rather than Pharisaic. It is difficult to form any decided opinion about their doctrinal views, partly from the comparative lateness of their literature, and partly because the Rabbinical charges against them cannot be absolutely trusted. It seems at least doubtful, whether they really denied the Resurrection, as asserted by the Rabbis, and from whom the Church Fathers have copied the charge as a truthful statement. Today, they do insist on that doctrine, but it was not known with certainty if they did in the days of Christ. They strongly believed in the Unity of God; they held the doctrine of Angels and devils; they received the Pentateuch as of sole Divine authority, and disregarded any thought to the prophetic literature; they regarded Mount Gerizim as the place chosen of God, maintaining that it alone had not been covered by the flood, as the Jews asserted the same of Mount Moriah.

The Samaritans were most strict and zealous in what of Biblical and traditional Law they received, and finally, and most important of all, they looked for the coming of a Messiah in whom the promise would be fulfilled that our Lord God would raise up a prophet from the midst of them that was like unto Moses. In Samaria, Jesus would find a soil better prepared for the Divine Seed, or, at least, be less encumbered by the thistles and tares of traditionalism and Pharisaic bigotry.

SESSION 20

17. Read John 4:7-8
(1) No references
18. Read John 4:9
(1) Sirach 50:25-26 (2) Matthew 10:5
19. Read John 4:10
(1) Sirach 24:20-21 (3) Jeremiah 2:13
(2) Isaiah 55:1
20. Read John 4:11
(1) No reference
21. Read John 4:12
(1) Matthew 12:11 (2) John 8:53
22. Read John 4:13-14
(1) Isaiah 44:3 (5) John 7:37-39
(2) Isaiah 49:10 (6) Revelation 7:16
(3) Joel 4:18 (7) Revelation 21:6
(4) John 6:35, 58
23. Read John 4:15-16
(1) No reference

John 4:7-16

- 7 A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."
8 His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.
9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.)
10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."
11 (The woman) said to him, "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water?
12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?"
13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again;
14 but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

- 15 he woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."
16 Jesus said to her, "Go call your husband and come back."

This narrative permits John to develop further the theme of the water of Judaism, replaced by the life-giving water of Christ. The rabbinical comparison of the Torah with water (as cleansing, as satisfying thirst, and as promoting life) affords the background of John's teaching, as does also the Dead Sea Scrolls. Once again Christ is the fulfillment of what the Law could only promise (1:17). (JBC)

Two questions have been raised about the conversation with the Samaritan woman: why a woman should come in the heat of midday rather than in the evening to draw water, and why she should come so far when she must have passed several running streams on the way. The second question overlooks the sacred character of the well; the first assumes that she came from Sychar, whereas she may have come to fetch water for the men working in fields close by. Such questions had no interest for the narrator. The themes are the living water (verses 7-15), and spiritual worship (verses 16-24), leading to Jesus' self-disclosure as Messiah (verses 25-26) (IB)

Verses 7-9:

Not only was it unheard of for a rabbi to speak familiarly with a woman in public, but also for a Jew to request water of a Samaritan. Jews considered Samaritans, and therefore their utensils for eating and drinking, unclean [but that may not have been the case in Jesus' time] . Jesus was untroubled by such scruples; the Gospels frequently record his enlightened attitude toward women and also that on occasion he spoke favorably of Samaritans (cf. Luke 10:33; 17:6). (JBC)

Verse 10:

the gift of God -- This gift would be Jesus himself, whom the woman does not yet recognize. She sees only a Jew, and a thirsty traveler. (JBC)

living water -- The woman first takes it to mean running water as distinct from well or cistern water, but as Jesus explains, it means "water of life," a figure borrowed from the OT (Jeremiah 2:13; Zechariah 14:8; Ezekiel 47:9; Proverbs 13:14), where it signifies divine vitality, revelation, and wisdom. In rabbinical use the figure was generally applied to the Torah. "The well of Numbers 21:16ff is the Torah." Once again, Jesus will truly give what the Law merely promised. (JBC)

Verse 12:

Since Jesus cannot mean to get water from the well, where will he get it? Even Jacob had had no better source than this well. The woman's attempt at irony is, of course, an irony itself for the Christian reader, who knows full well how much greater than Jacob is the one who speaks with her (cf. also 8:53). (JBC) [Was it really the irony of the woman, or could it have been her own ignorance of religious ideas?]

our father Jacob -- The Samaritans also claimed descent from the patriarchs, through the Joseph tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. [The territory of Samaria was located in the ancient territory of Ephraim and Manasseh. MINE]

who gave us this cistern -- By these words the water of the well is qualified as "water of Judaism" (cf. 2:6). (JBC)

Verses 13-14:

Jesus begins to explain his meaning. Sirach 24:20 proclaims that the drinker of wisdom will thirst again, that is, that his desire for wisdom will become ever more insatiable. However, such a desire could never be satisfied. The water that Christ will give, on the contrary, will satisfy thirst forever; whoever drinks of this water will have the fountain of eternal life within him. The Christian reader is again reminded of baptism, the water of Christ that confers the gift of eternal life. (JBC)

Verses 15-18:

The woman still misunderstands and asks, perhaps ironically, for this so marvelous water that would quench her thirst and end her trips to the well. Christ's reply leads her to recognize that he possesses superhuman knowledge; from this it should be another step to recognize that his words had a deeper meaning. (JBC)

Verses 7-15:

The request for a drink was natural, since the traveler had neither the skin bucket nor the rope needed for drawing water from so deep a well, and Oriental courtesy never refused such a demand (cf. Job 22:7; Proverbs 25:21). The woman's surprise was due to something in the dress and account of the stranger; for, as the evangelist explains for his Gentile readers, "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." The feeling of Jews toward Samaritans is well illustrated by the son of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus 50:25-26). Scholars have given many citations from the rabbis to illustrate the repugnance felt on the Jewish side. Of special pertinence is this saying from the early 2nd century A.D.: "He that eats the bread of the Samaritans is like to one that eats the flesh of swine." Small wonder, then, that the woman, in giving Jesus water, indulged in this ironical question (verse 9). (IB)

The dialogue that follows conforms to a pattern frequent in chapters 3, 4, and 6, and is paralleled in Mark 7:15-23 and 8:15-20. In each of the six discourses (3:3-9; 4:10-15, 32-39; 6:27-41, 41-48, 51-60), Jesus utters a profound saying which is misunderstood. The misunderstanding is expressed in a stupid question to which Jesus replied with a slightly modified repetition of the saying before explaining and applying its meaning. "Living water" is understood to mean running water, as opposed to rain water. The woman understands this as a slight upon the gift of the patriarch who had this well sunk centuries before. Jesus replies that the water of which she is thinking can satisfy only bodily thirst, and then explains that he refers to a spiritual gift. This is (1) a direct gift of God (verse 10); (2) the living; that is, "true" to type, "eternal," spiritual water; and (3) a spontaneous energy of unfailing interior grace (verse 14). (IB)

Water, as a symbol of the satisfaction of man's highest need (1), is a frequent metaphor in the OT (cf. Psalms 23:2; 36:9; 42:1-2; 65:10; Isaiah 12:3; 44:3; 55:1-2). God himself is the "fountain of living waters" (Jeremiah 2:13). Wisdom is described as "a stream of water" (Ecclesiasticus 24:30), and Philo, in a passage which comes near to the saying of John's Christ, writes: "The man who is capable of running swiftly it bids stay not to draw breath but press forward to the most high divine Logos, who is the fountain of Wisdom, in order that he may draw from the flowing stream and, instead of death, find life eternal as his prize." That "living water" (2) as equivalent to "the real water" is seen by the synonymous expressions "the living bread" (6:51), "the bread of life" (6:35, 48), and "the real bread" (6:32). The evangelist, or an editor, interprets this water as "the Spirit," which those who believed in him were to receive" (7:39). This spiritual gift, like

the “real bread”, brings eternal satisfaction. The gift of God is Christ (3); the gift of Christ is the Spirit, that “other Counselor”, who “dwells with you, and will be in you” (14:16-17). This indwelling Spirit, creative and energizing, not only brings back to the memory of his disciples “words of eternal life,” but also becomes in them a self-renewing force constantly ensuring fellowship with Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal (cf. 17:3)--a “spring of water welling up to eternal life” (cf. 7:38). Verse 15 shows that the woman has not yet grasped the hidden meaning. (IB)

24. Read John 4:17
(1) No reference

25. Read John 4:18
(1) II Kings 17:24-34

26. Read John 4:19
(1) Hosea 1:3 (2) John 9:17

John 4:17-19

- 17 The woman answered and said to him, "I do not have a husband." Jesus answered her, "You are right in saying, 'I do not have a husband.'"
- 18 For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true."
- 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.
The woman now perceives Jesus to be a prophet. (JBC)

Summary from IB:

The transition to the next stage in the dialogue is made by a favorite device of John the Evangelist to evoke a recognition of Jesus’ supernatural knowledge (cf. 1:42, 48; 2:24 - 3:2). For this reason it is futile to ask how our Lord knew the details of this woman’s private life. It is not less futile to try to find an allegorical significance in the mention of her five husbands. The writer is concerned only to elicit from the woman an acknowledgment that Jesus is a prophet, and a question to open up a dialogue about true worship.

Summary from LToJC:

It is difficult to suppose that Jesus asked the woman to call her husband (in verse 16) with the primary object of awakening in her a sense of sin. This might follow, but the text gives no hint of it. Nor does anything in the bearing of the woman indicate such an effect; indeed, her reply and her after-reference to it imply the contrary. We do not even know for certain, whether the five previous husbands had died or divorced her, and, if it was a case of divorce with whom the blame lay, although not only the peculiar mode in which Jesus refers to it, but the present condition of the woman, seem to point to a sinful life in the past. When the Savior so unexpectedly laid open to her a past, which He could only have supernaturally known, the conviction at once arose in her that He was a Prophet. To be a Prophet meant to a Samaritan that He was the Messiah, since they acknowledged none other than Moses. It was an immense, almost immeasurable, advance when this woman recognized in this Jewish stranger the Messiah. It was he who

had first awakened within her higher thoughts, and he had pointed her to spiritual and eternal realities. On the strength of the evidence the most powerfully convincing to a mind such as hers--that of telling her, suddenly and startling, what he could not have known, except through higher than human means of this information.

It is a much more difficult question, why Jesus should have asked for the presence of her husband. It seems, as in the answer of verse 15 that it marked the utmost limit of the woman's comprehension. None but the plainest statements was she able to grasp; and it is not unnatural to suppose that, having reached the utmost limits of which she was capable, Jesus now asked for her husband, in order that, through the introduction of another so near to her, the horizon might be enlarged.

Those who know how difficult it is to lodge any new idea into the mind of an uneducated rustic in our own land, after all our advantages of civilized contact and education, will understand how utterly at a loss this countrywoman must have been to grasp the meaning of Jesus. But He taught, not as we teach. Thus he reached her heart in that dimly conscious longing which she expressed although her intellect was incapable of distinguishing the new truth.

27. Read John 4:20

- (1) Deuteronomy 11:29
- (2) Deuteronomy 27:4

- (3) Joshua 8:33
- (4) Psalm 122:1-5

28. Read John 4:21

- (1) No reference

29. Read John 4:22

- (1) II Kings 17:27

- (2) Psalm 76:2-3

30. Read John 4:23

- (1) No reference

31. Read John 4:24

- (1) II Corinthians 3:17

32. Read John 4:25

- (1) John 1:41

33. Read John 4:26

- (1) John 9:37

John 24:20-26

20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain; but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem."

21 Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

22 You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we

- understand, because salvation is from the Jews.
- 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him.
- 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth."
- 25 The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Anointed; when he comes, he will tell us everything."
- 26 Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking with you."

Verse 20:

Her question may well have been an attempt to divert the conversation into less embarrassing channels, it is one that might be put naturally under the circumstances: What would a prophet say with regard to the long-standing controversy between the Jews and Samaritans concerning the proper place of sacrificial worship? Mt. Gerizim, at the foot of the which this conversation took place, was the Samaritan place of worship; here the patriarchs had sacrificed (Genesis 12:7; 33:20), and here, according to the Samaritan version of Deuteronomy 27:4 (Mt. Ebal in the MT), the Israelites had first set up an altar in Palestine. (JBC)

Verse 21:

Jesus replies that very soon such a question will have no more relevance--the Samaritan-Jewish controversy will have been superseded by a revelation that renders it superfluous (cf. 2:19). When the history of salvation has progressed further, it will be seen that the Temple was superfluous to this history. (JBC)

Verse 22:

Jesus must agree that in Judaism, and not in the Samaritan aberration from it, God's revelation has been safeguarded. In good faith though they may be, the Samaritans nevertheless have preserved the truth given by God in only a distorted form. (JBC)

[salvation is from the Jews](#) -- The best proof of this lies in him who speaks, who stands firmly within the authentic traditions of Israel and who is the fulfillment of its expectation. (JBC)

Verse 23:

Nevertheless, even the authentic traditions of Israel have merely led to a consummation that lies beyond its capacities. (JBC)

[the hour is coming](#) -- the "hour" of Jesus glorification is the "hour" of the Church. (JBC)

[is now here](#) -- For its efficacy, the true worship of believers depends upon the glorification of Christ; but such is always possible in virtue of this same efficacy, even as the just men of the old covenant were saved by the same faith that joins Christians to God (cf. Romans 4:23-25). (JBC)

[true worshipers](#) -- Those who worship God within a new relation that could be encompassed neither by Judaism nor Samaritanism. (JBC)

Verse 24:

[God is Spirit](#) -- In I Corinthians 15:45 Paul speaks of Christ as "life-giving spirit." "Spirit" in the biblical sense does not define God's nature so much as it describes his life-giving activity (see 1:32f.). God is Spirit in that he gives the Spirit; so also God is light and love (I John 1:5; 4:8). This explains how and why the true worshipper of God must

worship him in “Spirit and truth.” The two words actually signify a simple idea. (JBC)
Verse 25:

The woman has already recognized in Jesus a prophet; now she begins to surmise that he might be the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:18. Her statement is, once again, an implied question. It was probably under this figure that the Samaritans, who accepted only the Pentateuch as inspired Scripture, represented their belief in the coming of a Messiah. Little is known about the messianic belief that the Samaritans shared with the Jews; the Messiah himself they called *Ta’eb*, “he who returns” or “he who restores.” (JBC)

Verse 26:

Jesus accepts this designation of himself. (JBC)

"I am he, the one who is speaking with you." -- These words reproduce Yahweh's pronouncement in Isaiah 52:6. In view of the special significance of “I am” as Jesus' designation of himself in John, it is likely that John characteristically suggests another level of meaning here in Jesus' affirmation. (JBC)

Summary from IB:

The burning question discussed between Jews and Samaritans was about the divinely appointed site for the central worship and sacrifice of the religion of Israel. The quarrel started with the building of the temple on Mount Gerizim as a rival to the temple at Jerusalem, but it had been destroyed by John Hyrcanus in 128 B.C. As we have already seen, the Samaritans could point to passages in the Pentateuch which gave them a strong case over against Jerusalem.

Shechem was one of the most venerable religious sites in the land, with its patriarchal associations. It was here that after the conquest Joshua had made the final covenant with the people, “and set them a statue and an ordinance in Shechem. ... And [he] took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord” (Joshua 24:25-26). The Samaritan Pentateuch also, immediately after the Decalogue (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21), has a command to erect great stones on Mount Gerizim, and to build an altar to the Lord and offer sacrifices upon it. But most scholars regard this as a tendentious addition to the original Hebrew text. In the time of our Lord both Jews and Samaritans firmly believed that their own form of the text was the right one, and the vested interests on either side were fiercely defended. The woman states the case and appeals to the “prophet” for a decision (verse 20).

The sublime answer of Jesus lifts the conception of true worship far above the rival claims of local cults. In verse 21 Jesus accepts the role of prophet and declares that the hour will soon strike to usher in the new age of the messianic kingdom. When that time comes, this woman and her compatriots will know a higher order of worship than the national rites of Mount Gerizim or Mount Zion. They will know God in his universal Fatherhood, and will worship him accordingly.

In Judaism (verse 22), with its fuller revelation through the prophets, some hints of this worthier ideal have already been proclaimed. Thus Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple (I Kings 8:27) asked: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built?” So, in the closing chapter of Isaiah (66:1-2) the Lord deprecates the building of a house for him to dwell in, whose throne is in heaven. Rather, “to this man

will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word.” The same chapter closes with a description of the assembling at “my holy mountain Jerusalem” of “all your brethren ... out of all nations” for “an offering unto the Lord” (Isaiah 66:18-23). Even more striking is the message of the last of the prophetic books: “For, from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering” (Malachi 1:11). The Samaritans rejected all of the OT except for the Pentateuch. Furthermore, the evangelist must have intended to convey the thought that he who was Messiah and incarnate Word, and was bringing salvation to the world, was sprung from Israel (cf. Romans 9:3-5). It is true that “he came to his own home, and his own people received him not” (1:11). But it was among the Jews that he found some who were “waiting for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25), and they received him, and from them came his first disciples and apostles. The eschatological hour (verse 23) has brought the dawn of the day of the Lord. The men of Samaria will soon be flocking to hear the good news from Jesus the Christ. Possibly there is also a veiled reference to the mission of Philip, when numbers of Samaritans were to receive the Christian Gospel. But the reference widens out at this point, and true worship is required from all who recognize the true nature of God.

“God is Spirit” (verse 24). This is one of the three affirmations John uses about the divine nature; cf. I John 1:5; 4:8: “God is light,” “God is love.” This conception is common to Jewish and to Greek thought. In modern usage, spirit is the contrary of matter, and the spiritual is equivalent to the immaterial. In this sense the spirituality of God is a philosophical theory derived from the Greeks, and not a doctrine of Judaism in biblical times or thereafter, any more than Jewish monotheism is a doctrine of the unity of God in the metaphysical sense. The main thought here is that the highest part of man’s nature should be attuned to God, who is Spirit, and that his worship must be based upon the reality of God whom he approaches in devotion. The sense of the divine reality arises from God’s own initiative. He it is who seeks such worshippers, and bestows the spirit of truth.

In verses 25 and 26 the woman’s rejoinder is not an evasion, but rather an acknowledgment that this thorny question will be settled finally when the Messiah, expected by both Jew and Samaritan, comes “to show us all things”. From the Samaritan literature of a later period it seems that there was an expectation of such a Messiah, called in their language *Ta’ebh* (“he who returns”). As they did not accept the prophetic books with their wealth of messianic prediction, the Samaritans probably based their hopes on the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:15, for they looked for a second but inferior Moses, who would be a prophet, but at the same time a temporal conqueror and king. It may have been a pretender to this title who promised to recover the sacred vessels which Moses had buried on Mount Gerizim, and whose rising was ruthlessly repressed by Pilate (Josephus. *Antiquities*. XVIII. 4. 1). This remark by the woman opens the way for the announcement by Jesus, “I who speak to you am he.” This self-revelation contrasts with the secrecy about this claim which Jesus observed according to the Synoptic Gospels. The danger of a messianic revolt in Samaria was far less than in Galilee. As elsewhere, John regards the earthly mission of our Lord in the light of the later recognition of his nature and person.

Summary from LToJC:

The twin heights of Mounts Gerizim and Ebal enclose the valley of Shechem. The well of Jacob is today partially filled with rubbish and stones, but originally it must have gone down about 150 feet. As the whole district abounds in springs, the object of the patriarch must have been to avoid occasions of strife with the Amorite herdsmen who were around at that time.

At the well of Jacob several ancient Roman roads meet and part. The southward road leads close by Shiloh to Jerusalem; the westward one traverses the valley of Shechem; the northward one brings one to the ancient Sychar, only about half-a-mile from the well; eastward there are two ancient Roman roads--one winds south-east to later merge with the main road while the other goes due east before descending in a south-easterly direction through *Wady Farah* which empties into the Jordan River. *Wady Farah* was most probably in the immediate neighborhood where Jesus had taught and his disciples had baptized. It was in Judea, but it was sufficiently removed from Jerusalem. From this spot it is about twenty miles, across a somewhat difficult terrain to Jacob's Well. It would be a long and toilsome day's journey on a summer day, and we can understand, how, at its end, Jesus would rest wearily on the parapet which enclosed the well, while his disciples went to buy the necessary provisions in neighboring Sychar.

Rather than the time being noon, it was probably in the evening when Jesus and his disciples emerged into the rich plain of Samaria. Jesus waited while the others went to Sychar. It is quite possible that John remained behind with Jesus. They would scarcely have left him alone, especially in that place; and the whole narrative reads like that of one who had been present at what passed. It bears the mark of contemporary authorship. At the time of Christ, Jesus' intimate knowledge of Samaritan and Jewish relations would have allowed his disciples to purchase food in Sychar; however, not more than two centuries following Christ's death, Jewish law would not have permitted such a purchase from the Samaritans.

There is such minuteness of detail about the narrative, and with it such charm of simplicity, affection, reverence, and depth of spiritual insight as to carry not only the conviction of its truthfulness, but also instinctively to suggest to us "the beloved disciple" as its witness. Already he had taken the place nearest to Jesus, and he saw and spoke as none of the other disciples. Jesus, weak, weary, and resting while his disciples go to buy food is a truthful evangelic presentation of Christ in His human weakness and want.

He is sitting by Jacob's Well. It was about 6 o'clock in the evening, when the travel-stained pilgrims reached that "parcel of ground." The circumstance that the disciples left his company to go for provisions suggests that it is evening, since noon was not the time either for the sale of provisions, nor for their purchase by travelers. In the weakness of His hunger and weariness, the glory of His Divine Personality shines through.

A poor, ignorant Samaritan woman came to the Well on a humble, ordinary duty of work. There was another well on the east side of the little town, and much nearer to Sychar than "Jacob's Well", and it was probably to that first well the women of Sychar generally went. In those days such work no longer devolved, as it did in earlier times, on the matrons and maidens of fair degree, but rather on women in much humbler station. There are several reasons why this woman might have chosen Jacob's Well. (1) She may

have been at work in the fields nearby; (2) her home may have been nearer in that direction; or (3) she may have wanted to avoid being in the company of the more common women of the village on that evening. The latter is implied in verse 18.

Both to Jesus and the woman, the meeting was not sought. Rather it was providential in the truest sense as it was God-brought. The request "Give me to drink" was natural on the part of the thirsty traveler. His speech would, by its pronunciation, place His nationality without doubt. Even if He had not spoken, the woman would have recognized Him as a Jew by his appearance and His manner of apparel. Any kind address, conveying a request not absolutely necessary, would naturally surprise the woman because "the Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." Or rather, as the expression implies they would have no needless, friendly, nor familiar intercourse with them--which is a statement true of all times. We need to remember that this was an ignorant Samaritan woman of the lower order, and two points would have readily stood out in her mind: (1) The Jews in their wicked pride would have no intercourse with them; and (2) Gerizim, not Jerusalem, as the Jews falsely asserted, was the place of rightful worship.

Although Jesus may not have come to Sychar with the conscious purpose of that which ensued, yet given the meeting with the Samaritan woman, what followed seems almost a matter of necessity. For it is certain that Christ, such as the Gospels describe him, could not have been brought into contact with spiritual ignorance and want, any more than with physical distress, without offering it relief. The Incarnate Son of God could do no other than to bring health and life to those lives who were living among disease and death--the Savior had come to seek and to save that which was lost. He was not like what she thought and knew about the Jews. He was what Israel was intended to have become to mankind; what it was the final object of Israel to have been. In Him was God's gift to mankind. In the discussion concerning water, the Divine Teacher explained, not only the difference between ordinary water and that of which He had spoken, but in a manner to bring her to the threshold of higher truth. It was not water like that of Jacob's Well which He would give, but "living water." It was water which for ever extinguished the thirst, by meeting all the inward wants of the soul; water also, which, in him who drank of it became a well, not merely quenching the thirst on this side of time, but "springing up into everlasting life." It was not only the meeting of felt wants, but of a new life.

In many passages the teachings of the rabbis is compared to water, but never to a "well of water springing up." The difference is very great. For it is the boast of Rabbinism, that its disciples drink of the waters of their teachers, and chief merit lies in its receptiveness, not spontaneity. Furthermore, higher praise could not be given than that of being "a well-plastered cistern, which lets not out a drop of water," and to that sense to "a spring whose waters ever grow stronger." But this is quite the opposite of what our Lord teaches. In one of their Targums "the words of the Law" are likened to "a well of living waters. The saying of our Lord to the woman referred to the gift of that new spiritual life in Him, of which faith is the outcome.

Of all the myths which would be likely to enter into Jewish imagination, the most unlikely would be one presenting the Christ in familiar converse with a woman, and she a Samaritan, offering to her a well of water springing into everlasting life, and setting

before her a spiritual worship of which Jerusalem was not at its center.

All her life the woman had heard that Gerizim was the mount of worship, the holy hill which waters of the Flood had never covered, and that the Jews were in deadly error with their assumption that it was Mount Zion. The woman had covert purpose in her question to Jesus. Here was undoubtedly a Prophet, and He a Jew. Were the Samaritans then in error about the right place of worship, and what was she to think, and to do? Once more Jesus answers her question by leading her far beyond it--beyond all controversy; even on to the goal of all His teaching. So marvelously does he speak to the simple in heart. "Spirit is God"--and only worship in spirit and in truth is acceptable to such a God.

Higher or more Christ-like teaching than this could not be uttered. And she who heard, thus far understood it, that in the glorious picture which was set before her, she saw the coming of the Kingdom of the Messiah. It was then that he told her plainly that He was the Messiah. This was the crowning lesson of that day.

34. Read John 4:27-30
(1) No reference

John 4:27-30

- 27 At that moment his disciples returned, and were amazed that he was talking with a woman, but still no one said, "What are you looking for?" or "Why are you talking with her?"
- 28 The woman left her water jar and went into the town and said to the people,
- 29 "Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Messiah?"
- 30 They went out of the town and came to him.

Verse 27:

The disciples now return from their errand and are more surprised to find Jesus speaking with a woman than that he should be conversing with a Samaritan. However, they know their Master well enough not to present him with an argumentation while she is present. (JBC)

Verse 28:

In departing, the woman undoubtedly left her water jar that Jesus might drink--in dwelling on the consequences of Jesus' request in verse 7, it must be remembered that the request was a real one. John may see a symbolic significance here: Now that the woman has come to the source of living water, she has no further need of any other (verse 15). (JBC)

Verses 29-30:

The woman carries the same message of Philip (1:45f.), but in a much more tentative fashion. (JBC)

Summary from IB:

On their return the disciples, "marveled that he was talking with a woman", not because of her nationality, nor of her character. There is a rabbinical saying: "A man should hold no conversation with a woman in the street, not even with his own wife, still

less with any other woman, lest men should gossip.” The disciples wisely kept their surprise to themselves. Now that the conversation is interrupted, the woman leaves Jesus to report to the citizens of the neighboring town her suspicion that the stranger is the Messiah. She leaves her water jar beside the well, since to carry it full on her head would prevent speed. She interprets the insight of Jesus as a sign that he is a prophet. Can he be the prophet par excellence, the Messiah? She conveys enough of his deep impression on her to the townspeople to bring them in a troop to the well.

Summary from LToJC:

The disciples had returned from Sychar. That Jesus should converse with a woman, was so contrary to all Judean notions of a Rabbi, that they were surprised. Yet, in their reverence for him, they dared not ask any questions. Meanwhile the woman, forgetful of her errand, and only conscious of that new well-spring of life which had risen within her, had left the unfilled water pot by the Well and hurried into the town.

We are led to infer, that these strange tidings soon gathered many around her; they questioned, and as they ascertained from her the indisputable fact of His supernatural knowledge, believed on Him, so far as the woman could set Him before them as an object of faith. Under this impression they went out of the town, and came towards Him.

35. Read John 4:31-33

(1) No reference

36. Read John 4:34

(1) John 5:30, 36

(2) John 6:38

(3) John 9:4

(4) John 17:4

37. Read John 4:35

(1) Matthew 9:37-38

(2) Luke 10:2

(3) Revelations 14:15

38. Read John 4:36

(1) Psalm 126:5-6

(2) Amos 9:13-14

39. Read John 4:37

(1) Deuteronomy 20:6

(2) Deuteronomy 28:30

(3) Job 31:8

(4) Micah 6:15

40. Read John 4:38

(1) No reference

John 4:31-38

31 Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat."

32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know."

33 So the disciples said to one another, "Could someone have brought him something to eat?"

- 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work.
- 35 Do you not say, 'In four months the harvest will be here'? I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest.
- 36 The reaper is already receiving his payment and gathering crops for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together.
- 37 For here the saying is verified that 'One sows and another reaps.'
- 38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for; others have done the work, and you are sharing the fruits of their work."

Verses 31-33:

Meanwhile the disciples also appear slow to understand, as they too take a profound utterance in its surface sense. (JBC)

Verse 34:

In these words Jesus sums up his entire career (cf. 17:4). (JBC)

Verse 35:

Jesus apparently cites a Palestinian proverb. It takes four months from sowing until harvest. The Gezer calendar, dating from the 10th century B.C, allows precisely this interval. The harvest of which Jesus speaks, however, which is of God's planting, is ready now (cf. Matthew 9:35 - 10:1; Luke 10:2). The proof of this is in the woman who goes even now to witness to the people in her village, who will soon come and see for themselves (verse 42). (JBC)

Verse 36:

In this harvest there is no interval at all from sowing to reaping, but the reaper overtakes the sower and both rejoice together (cf. Amos 9:13). (JBC)

Verses 37-38:

Herein is verified an old saying (cf. Job 31:8; Ecclesiastes 2:21), but in a different sense than it would ordinarily have, since both the sowing and the reaping of this harvest is the work of God. The disciples, who will reap a quick harvest in Samaria (cf. Acts 8:4-25), must remember that this can only be because of the nature of the word they will sow, a word that has already been sown by Jesus himself and by all who revealed the word before him. (JBC)

Summary from IB:

While the woman has left to tell her townspeople about Jesus, but before their return, in the meantime a conversation goes on between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus declines an offer of food with the cryptic saying: "I have food to eat of which you do not know." As usual, the disciples take these words literally. In explaining their deeper meaning, Jesus then utters a series of sayings in which it is not easy to trace the connection of thought. A paraphrase is therefore offered: "My real food consists in carrying out to the end the purpose for which my Father send me into the world. You have a saying, 'Four months to the harvest.' As you look on these whitening fields, you see that harvest is close at hand. There is another harvest approaching, swifter than any that you have known. It is a spiritual harvest. There, too, sower and reaper has each his appointed toil. The reaper is now to receive his wages and to gather the harvest to eternal life. The sower shares in his joy, for he now knows that his own labor has not been in

vain. Their kinds of work are distinct, as your proverb has it, 'One sows, another reaps.' It is into this harvest field that I am sending you as reapers. The first fruits of Samaria are already waiting to be gathered. You must not congratulate yourselves that the garnered crops will stand to your credit alone. There would be no harvest for you to reap if others had not sown the grain."

In verse 34 "my food" recalls our Lord's answer to the first challenge of the tempter in the wilderness (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4). Three phrases in this verse represent three of the leading ideas of this Gospel: (1) "To do the will of the Father"; (2) "Of him who sent me"; and (3) "To accomplish his work. On (1) "To do the will of the Father" (cf. 5:30; 6:38; 14:31), it is also a watchword in Hebrews (10:6-10), where Psalm 40 is cited to explain the true nature of the sacrifice of Christ. On (2) "Of him who sent me" is a designation of God used on the lips of Jesus 25 times in John, with other variations of the verb, which all emphasize the mission of the Son in the world. And on (3) "To accomplish his work" (cf. 5:36; 9:4; 17:4; 19:28), is an aim that reaches its triumphant culmination in the cry from the cross: "It is finished" (19:30).

The proverbial saying in verse 35 was probably current in Palestine, where to this day the sowing is often delayed until the end of December and the harvest is reaped at the beginning of May. It has sometimes been erroneously inferred that we have here a chronological datum for the length of our Lord's ministry. The proverb emphasized the interval between sowing and reaping. Jesus was looking at the waving fields of wheat and barley in the rich plain, already ripening for the sickle, and this suggests the imminent harvest of souls in the neighboring town, although the sowing has been so recent. Notice the contrast between "yet four months," and "already white for harvest." For the evangelist John these words and those which follow have a wider and deeper reference. The language is eschatological. The kingdom of God is at hand. In the OT, harvest is the figure under which the judgment that is to usher in that great event represented. In the Synoptic setting Jesus was preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and when he saw the crowds he said to his disciples: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:35-38).

Verse 38 recalls Matthew 11:13; Luke 16:16, the prophets who "prophesied until John" after whom "the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently." In this eschatological harvest that marks the coming of Jesus and the mission of his disciples there is an eternal "now," in which the separation of the sower and reaper is lost in the common joy of harvest.

Summary from LToJC:

The disciples had urged their Master to eat of the food which they had brought. But His soul was otherwise engaged. Thoughts were present of the glorious future, of a universal worship of the Father by those whom He had taught, and of which He had just seen such unexpected earnest. Even his words of rebuke only made them wonder whether, unknown to them, some one had brought Him food. It was not the only, nor the last, instance of their dullness to spiritual realities. The words he spoke will appear more striking if we bear in mind that perhaps at that very moment, the Samaritans, coming from Sychar, were appearing in sight.

b. TO THE PEOPLE OF SYCHAR

41. Read John 4:39-42 entirely through one time.
(1) No reference
42. Read John 4:39-41
(1) No reference
43. Read John 4:42
(1) I John 4:14

John 4:39-42

- 39 Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me everything I have done."
- 40 When the Samaritans came to him, they invited him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.
- 41 Many more began to believe in him because of his word,
- 42 and they said to the woman, "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world."

Verses 39-41:

The Samaritans follow the model of all who have true faith. First having believed because of the woman's testimony and because of the miracle that she related of Jesus' having revealed natural secrets (cf. 1:49f.), they eventually come to believe because of his own word (cf. 8:30; 10:38), the same word that the disciples would later bring to Samaria. (JBC)

Verse 42:

savior of the world -- Not only do they come to believe, they also recognize in him something more than the Messiah to which the woman had witnessed (cf. 1:50). His title does not seem to have been used ordinarily of the Messiah; elsewhere it is found only in I John 4:14. John, of course, intends it to be understood in the full light of Christian revelation. What the Samaritans would have understood is less clear, but Jesus, by transcending national lines in dealing with them, would have laid a basis for a universal affirmation of God's salvation. Thus their confession is the sum of John's reflection on the revelation to Nicodemus (3:16ff.). (JBC)

Summary from IB:

These verses resume the narrative interrupted after verse 30. Our attention now turns from the disciples to the Samaritans. They illustrate two types of faith. An invitation to stay in that town is given by a group whose faith rests on the unsupported testimony of the woman--"He told me all that I ever did." After a stay of two days, Jesus received the believing trust of many more who were attracted to him by the woman's witness, but went on to test his words for themselves until they could make their confession of faith. The avowal that Jesus is indeed the "Savior of the world" may be the evangelist's own adaptation to Christian ends of a title that was widely used in the Hellenistic cults of the contemporary world, and which also in the imperial cult was applied to the Roman emperors. But the word "Savior" was a title often given to God in

the OT (Isaiah 43:3, 11), and the removal of national conceptions of worship (verses 21-24) would inevitably lead on to the recognition that God's savior-hood is universal. The woman had learned from Jesus his claim to be Messiah. Jesus had transcended the distinction between Samaritan and Jewish conceptions of messiah-ship. John represents Jesus as saying to the Samaritans what has been affirmed in the report of the dialogue with Nicodemus (3:16-17; cf. I John 4:14).

Summary from LToJC:

And he remained there with them for two days. And many more believed because of His own word (speech, discourse), and said to the woman: "No longer because of your speaking do we believe. For we ourselves have heard, and know, that this is truly the Savior of the world."

We do not know what passed during these two days. Apparently there were no miracles, but those of His Word only. It was the deepest and purest of truth they learned, these simple men of simple faith, who had not learned of man, but listened to His word only. This was truly the Savior of the world.

CONTINUED IN SERIES 2